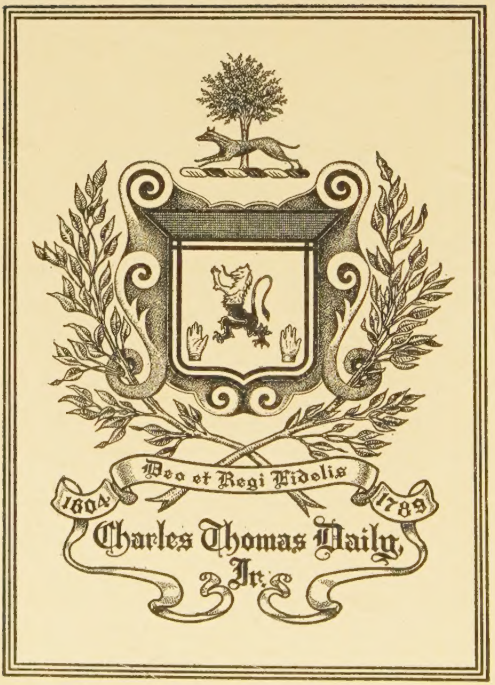
The EMBLEMS OF FIDELITY

A COMEDY IN LETTERS

JAMES LANE ALLEN


Deo et Regi Fidelis
1804
1789
Charles Thomas Daily
Jr.

THE EMBLEMS OF FIDELITY

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A Comedy in Letters

BY

JAMES LANE ALLEN

AUTHOR OF
"THE KENTUCKY CARDINAL,"
"THE KENTUCKY WARBLER," ETC.

There is nothing so ill-bred as audible laughter. . . . I am sure that since I have had the full use of my reason nobody has ever heard me laugh.

—*Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son.*

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1919

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TRANSLATION INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES,
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To

THE SPIRIT OF COMEDY

INCOMPARABLE ALLY
OF VICTORY

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE.....Famous elderly English novelist

BEVERLEY SANDS.....Rising young American novelist

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE....Practical lawyer, friend of Beverley Sands

GEORGE MARIGOLD.....Fashionable physician

CLAUDE MULLEN.....Fashionable nerve-specialist, friend of George Marigold

RUFUS KENT.....Long-winded president of a club

NOAH CHAMBERLAIN....Very learned, very absent-minded professor

PHILLIPS AND FAULDS.....Florists

BURNS AND BRUCE.....Florists

JUDD AND JUDD.....Florists

ANDY PETERS.....Florist

HODGE.....Stupid gardener of Edward Blackthorne

TILLY SNOWDEN.....Dangerous sweetheart of Beverley Sands

POLLY BOLES.....Dangerous sweetheart of Benjamin Doolittle, friend of Tilly Snowden

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN....Very devoted, very proud sensitive daughter of Noah Chamberlain

ANNE RAEBURN.....Protective secretary of Edward Blackthorne

THE EMBLEMS OF FIDELITY

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

King Alfred's Wood,
Warwickshire, England,
May 1, 1910.

My dear Mr. Sands:

I have just read to the end of your latest novel and under the outdoor influence of that Kentucky story have sat here at my windows with my eyes on the English landscape of the first of May: on as much of the landscape, at least, as lies within the grey, ivy-tumbled, rose-besprinkled wall of a companionable old Warwickshire garden.

You may or you may not know that I, too, am a novelist. The fact, however negligible otherwise, may help to disarm you of some very natural hostility at the approach of this letter from a stranger; for you probably agree with me that the writing of novels—not, of course, the mere odious manufacture of novels—results in the making of friendly, brotherly men across the barriers of nations, and that

we may often do as fellow-craftsmen what we could do less well or not do at all as fellow-creatures.

I shall not loiter at the threshold of this letter to fatigue your ear with particulars regarding the several parts of your story most enjoyed, though I do pause there long enough to say that no admirable human being has ever yet succeeded in wearying my own ears by any such desirable procedure. In England, and I presume in the United States, novelists have long noses for incense [poets, too, though of course only in their inferior way]. I repeat that we English novelists are a species of greyhound for running down on the most distant horizon any scampering, half-terrified rabbit of a compliment. But I freely confess that nature loaded me beyond the tendency of being a mere greyhound. I am a veritable elephant in the matter, being marvelously equipped with a huge, flexible proboscis which is not only adapted to admit praise but is quite capable of actively reaching around in every direction to procure it. Even the greyhound cannot run forever; but an elephant, if he once possess it, will wave such a proboscis till he dies.

There are likely to be in any very readable book a few pages which the reader feels tempted to tear out for the contrary reason, perhaps, that he cannot tear them out of his tenderness. Some haunting picture of the book-gallery that he would cut from the frame. Should you be displeased by the discrimination, I shall trust that you may be pleased nevertheless by the avowal that there is a scene in your novel which has peculiarly ensnared my affections.

At this point I think I can see you throw down my letter with more insight into human nature than patience with its foibles. You toss it aside and exclaim: "What does this Englishman drive at? Why does he not at once say what he wants?" You are right. My letter is perhaps no better than strangers' letters commonly are: coins, one side of which is stamped with your image and the other side with their image, especially theirs.

I might as well, therefore, present to you my side of the coin with the selfish image. Or, in terms of your blue-grass country life, you are the horse in an open pasture and I am the stableman who schemes to catch you: to do this, I approach, calling to you affec-

tionately and shaking a bundle of oats behind which is coiled a halter. You are thinking that if I once clutch you by the mane you will get no oats. But, my dear sir, you have from the very first word of this letter already been nibbling the oats. And now you are my animal!

There is, then, in your novel a remarkable description of a noonday woodland scene somewhere on your enchanted Kentucky uplands—a cool, moist forest spot. Into this scene you introduced some rare, beautiful Kentucky ferns. I can *see* the ferns! I can see the sunlight striking through the waving treetops down upon them! Now, as it happens, in the old garden under my windows, loving the shade and moisture of its trees and its wall, I have a bank of ferns. They are a marvelous company, in their way as good as Wordsworth's flock of daffodils; for they have been collected out of England's best and from other countries.

Here, then, is literally the root of this letter: Will you send me the root-stocks of some of those Kentucky ferns to grow and wave on my Warwickshire fern bank?

Do not suppose that my garden is on a

small scale a public park or exhibition, made as we have created Kensington Gardens. Everything in it is, on the contrary, enriched with some personal association. I began it when a young man in the following way:

At that period I was much under the influence of the Barbizon painters, and I sometimes entertained myself in the forests where masters of that school had worked by hunting up what I supposed were the scenes of some of Corot's masterpieces.

Corot, if my eyes tell me the truth, painted trees as though he were looking at enormous ferns. His ferns spring out of the soil and some rise higher than others as trees; his trees descend through the air and are lost lower down as ferns. One day I dug up some Corot ferns for my good Warwickshire loam. Another winter Christine Nilsson was singing at Covent Garden. I spent several evenings with her. When I bade her good-bye, I asked her to send me some ferns from Norway in memory of Balzac and *Seraphita.* Yet another winter, being still a young man and he, alas! a much older one, I passed an evening in Paris with Turgenieff. I would persist in talking about his novels and I remember

quoting these lines from one of them: "It was a splendid clear morning; tiny mottled cloudlets hung like snipe in the clear pale azure; a fine dew was sprinkled on the leaves and grass and glistened like silver on the spiders' webs; the moist dark earth seemed still to retain the rosy traces of the dawn; the songs of larks showered down from all over the sky."

He sat looking at me in surprised, touched silence.

"But you left out something!" I suggested, with the bumptiousness of a beginner in letters. He laughed slightly to himself—and perhaps more at me—as he replied: "I must have left out a great deal"—he, fiction's greatest master of compression. After a moment he inquired with a kind of vast patient condescension: "What is it that you definitely missed?" "Ferns," I replied. "Ferns were growing thereabouts." He smiled reminiscently. "So there were," he replied, smiling reminiscently. "If I knew where the spot was," I said, "I should travel to it for some ferns." A mystical look came into his eyes as he muttered rather to himself than for my ear: "That spot! Where is that spot? That

spot is all Russia!" In his exile, the whole of Russia was to him one scene, one fatherland, one pain, one passion. Sometime afterwards there reached me at home a hamper of Russian fern-roots with Turgenieff's card.

I tell you all this as I make the request, which is the body of this letter and, I hope, its wings, in order that you may intimately understand. I desire the ferns not only because you have interested me in your Kentucky by making it a living, lovely reality, but because I have become interested in your art and in you. While I read your book I believed that I saw the hand of youth joyously at work, creating where no hand had created before; or if on its chosen scene it found a ruin, then joyously trying to re-create reality from that ruin. But to create where no hand has created before, or to create them again where human things lie in decay—that to me is the true energy of literature.

I should not omit to tell you that some of our most tight-islanded, hard-headed reviewers have been praising your work as of the best that reaches us from America. It was one such reviewer that first guided me to your latest book. Now I myself have written

to some of our critics and have thrown my influence in favour of your fresh, beautiful art, which can only come from a fresh, beautiful nature.

Should you decide to bestow any notice upon this rather amazing letter, you will bear in mind of course that there will be pounds sterling for plants. Whatever character my deed or misdeed may later assume, it must first and at least have the nature of a transaction of the market-place.

So, turn out as it may, or not turn out at all, I am,

Gratefully yours,
EDWARD BLACKTHORNE.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO EDWARD BLACKTHORNE

Cathedral Heights, New York,
May 12, 1910.

MY DEAR MR. BLACKTHORNE:

Your letter is as unreal to me as if I had, in some modern Æsop's Fables, read how a whale, at ease in the depths of the sea, had taken the trouble to turn entirely round to encourage a puffing young porpoise; or of

how a black oak, majestic dome of a forest, had on some fine spring day looked down and complimented a small dogwood tree upon its size and the purity of its blossoms. And yet, while thus unreal, your letter is in its way the most encouragingly real thing that has ever come into my life. Before I go further I should like to say that I have read every book you have written and have bought your books and given them away with such zeal and zest that your American publishers should feel more interest in me than can possibly be felt by the gentlemen who publish mine.

It is too late to tell you this now. Too late, in bad taste. A man's praise of another may not follow upon that man's praise of him. Our virtues have their hour. If they do not act then, they are not like clocks which may be set forward but resemble fruits which lose their flavour when they pass into ripeness. Still, what I have said is honest. You may remember that I am yet moving amid life's uncertainties as a beginner, while you walk in quietness the world's highway of a great career. My praise could have borne little to you; yours brings everything to me. And you must reflect also that it is just a little

easier for any Englishman to write to an American in this way. The American could but fear that his letter might seriously disturb the repose of a gentleman who was reclining with his head in Shakespeare's bosom; and Shakespeare's entire bosom in this regard, as you know, Mr. Blackthorne, does stay in England.

It will give me genuine pleasure to arrange for the shipment of the ferns. A good many years have passed since I lived in Kentucky and I am no longer in close touch with people and things down there. But without doubt the matter can be managed through correspondence and all that I await from you now is express instructions. The ferns described in my book are not known to me by name. I have procured and have mailed to you along with this, lest you may not have any, some illustrated catalogues of American ferns, Kentucky ferns included. You have but to send me a list of those you want. With that in hand I shall know exactly how to proceed.

You cannot possibly understand how happy I am that my work has the approval of the English reviews, which still remain the best

in the world. To know that my Kentucky stories are liked in England—England which, remaining true to so many great traditions, holds fast to the classic tradition in her literature.

The putting forth of your own personal influence in my behalf is a source of joy and pride; and your wish to have Kentucky ferns growing in your garden in token of me is the most inspiring event yet to mark my life.

I am,

Sincerely yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS.

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

King Alfred's Wood,
Warwickshire, England,
May 22, 1910.

MY DEAR SANDS:

Your letter was brought out to me as I was hanging an old gate in a clover-field canopied with skylarks. When I cannot make headway against some obstruction in the development of a story, for instance, putting the hinges of the narrative where the reader will not see

any hinges, I let the book alone and go out and do some piece of work, surrounded by the creatures which succeed in all they undertake through zest and joy. By the time I get back, the hinges of the book have usually hung themselves without my knowing when or how. Hence the paradox: we achieve the impossible by doing the possible; we climb our mountain of troubles by walking away from it.

It is splendid news that I am to get the Kentucky ferns. Thank you for the catalogues. A list of those I most covet is enclosed. The cost, shipping expenses included, will not, I fear, exceed five pounds. Of course it would be a pleasure to pay fifty guineas, but I suppose I must restrict myself to the despicable market price. Shamefully cheap many of the dearest things in this world are; and what exorbitant prices we pay for the worthless!

A draft will be forwarded in advance upon receipt of the American shipper's address. Or I could send it forthwith to you. Meantime from now on I shall be remembering with impatience how many miles it is across the Atlantic Ocean and at what a snail's pace

American ferns travel. These will be awaited like guests whom one goes to the gate to meet.

You do not know the names of those you describe so wonderfully! I am glad. I abhor the names of my own. Of course, as they are bought, memoranda must be depended upon by which to buy them. These data, verified by catalogue, are inked on little wooden slabs as fern headstones. When each fern is planted, into the soil beside it is stuck its headstone, which, like that for a human being, tells the name, not the nature, of what it memorialises.

Hodge is the fellow who knows the ferns according to the slabs. It is time you should know Hodge by his slab. No such being can yet be found in the United States: your civilisation is too young. Hodge is my British-Empire gardener; and as he now looks out for every birthday much as for any total solar eclipse of the year—with a kind of growing solicitude lest the sun or the birthday should finally, as it passes, bowl him over for good—he announced to me with visible relief the other day that he had successfully passed another total natal eclipse; that he was fifty-eight. But Hodge is not fifty-eight years old. The battle of Hastings was fought in

1066 and Hodge without knowing it was beginning to be a well-grown lout then. For Hodge is English landscape gardening in human shape. He is the benevolent spirit of the English turf, a malign spirit to English weeds. He is wall ivy, a root, a bulb, a rake, a wheelbarrow of spring manure, a pile of autumn leaves, a crocus. In a distant future mythology of our English rural life he will perhaps rank where he belongs—as a luminary next in importance to the sun: a two-legged god be-earthed in old clothes, with a stiff back, a stiff temper, the jaw of the mastiff and the eye of a prophet.

It is Hodge who does the slabs. He would not allow anything to come into the garden without mastering that thing. For the sake of his own authority he must subdue as much of the Latin language as invades his territory along with the ferns. But I think nothing comparable to such a struggle against overwhelming odds—Hodge's brain pitted against the Latin names of the ferns—nothing comparable to the dull fury of that onset is to be found in the history of man unless it be England's war on Napoleon for twenty years. England did conquer Napoleon and finally

shut him up in a desolate, rocky place; and Hodge has finally conquered the names of the ferns and shut them up in a desolate, rocky place—his skull, his personal promontory.

Nowadays you should see him meet me in a garden path when I come down early some morning. You should see him plant himself before me and, taking off his cap and scratching the back of his neck with the back of his muddy thumb, make this announcement: "The *Asplenium filix-fœmina* put up two new shoots last night, sir. Bishop's crooks, I believe you calls 'em, sir." As though I were a farmer and my shepherd should notify me that one of the ewes had dropped twin lambs at three A. M. Hodge's tone implies more yet: the honour of the shoots—a questionable honour—goes to Hodge as their botanical sire!

When I receive visitors by reason of my books—and strangers do sometimes make pilgrimages to me on account of my grove of "Black Oaks"—if the day is pleasant, we have tea in the garden. While the strangers drink tea, I begin to wave the well-known proboscis over the company for any praise they may have brought along. Should this

seem adequate, I later reward them with a stroll. That is Hodge's hour and opportunity. Unexpectedly, as it would appear, but invariably, he steps out from some bush and takes his place behind me as we move.

When we reach the fern bank, the visitors regularly begin to inquire: "What is the name of this fern?" I turn helplessly to Hodge much as a drum-major, if asked by a by-stander what the music was that the band had just been playing, might wheel in dismay to the nearest horn. Hodge steps forward: now comes the reward of all his toil. "That is the *Polydactulum cruciato-cristatum*, sir." "And what is this one?" "That is the *Polypodium elegantissimum*, mum." Then you would understand what it sometimes means to attain scholarship without Oxford or Cambridge; what upon occasion it is to be a Roman orator and a garden ass.

You will be wondering why I am telling you this about Hodge. For the very particular reason that Hodge will play a part, I know not what part, in the pleasant business that has come up between us. He looms as the danger between me and the American ferns after the ferns shall have arrived here. It is

a fact that very few foreign ferns have ever done well in my garden, watch over them as closely as I may: especially those planted in more recent years. Could you believe it possible of human nature to refuse to water a fern, to deny a little earth to the root of a fern? Actually to scrape the soil away from it when there was nobody near to observe the deed, to jab at it with a sharp trowel? I shall not press the matter further, for I instinctively turn away from it. Perhaps each of us has within himself some incomprehensible little terrible spot and I feel that this is Hodge's spot. It is murder; Hodge is an assassin: he will kill what he hates, if he dares. I have been so aroused to defend his faithful character that I have devised two pleadings: first, Hodge is the essence of British parliaments, the sum total of British institutions; therefore he patriotically believes that things British should be good enough for the British —of course, their own ferns. At other times I am rather inclined to surmise that his malice and murderous resentment are due to his inability to take on any more Latin, least of all imported Latin. Hodge without doubt now defends himself against any more Latin

as a man with his back to the wall fights for his life: the personal promontory will hold no more.

You have written me an irresistible letter, though frankly I made no effort to resist it. Your praise of my books instantly endeared you to me.

Since a first plunge into ferns, then, has already brought results so agreeable and surprising, I am resolved to be bolder and to plunge a second time and more deeply.

Is there—how could there help being!—a *Mrs.* Beverley Sands? Mrs. Blackthorne wishes to know. I read your letter to Mrs. Blackthorne. Mrs. Blackthorne was charmed with it. Mrs. Blackthorne is charmed with *you.* Mr. Blackthorne is charmed with you. And Mr. and Mrs. Blackthorne would like to know whether there is a Mrs. Beverley Sands and, if so, whether she and you will not some time follow the ferns and come and take possession for a while of our English garden.

You and I can go off to ourselves and discuss our "dogwoods" and "black oaks"; and Mrs. Sands and Mrs. Blackthorne, at their tea across the garden, can exchange copies of their highly illuminated and pri-

vately circulated little masterpieces about their husbands. (The husbands should always edit the masterpieces!)

Both of you, will you come?

Finally, as to your generous propaganda in behalf of my books and as to the favourable reports which my publishers send me from time to time in the guise of New World royalties, you may think of the proboscis as now being leveled straight and rigid like a gun-barrel toward the shores of the United States, whence blow gales scented with so glorious a fragrance. I begin to feel that Columbus was not mistaken: America is turning out to be a place worth while.

Your deeply interested,

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO TILLY SNOWDEN

June 3.

DEAR TILLY:

Crown me with some kind of chaplet—nothing classic, nothing sentimental, but something American and practical—say with twigs of Kentucky sassafras or, better, with the

leaves of that forest favourite which in boyhood so fascinated me and lubricated me with its inner bark—entwine me, O Tilly, with a garland of slippery elm for the virtue of always making haste to share with you my slippery pleasures! I write at full speed now to empty into your lap, a wonderfully receptive lap, tidings of the fittest joy that has ever come to me as your favourite author—and favourite young husband to be.

The great English novelist Blackthorne, many of whose books we have read together (whenever you listened), recently stumbled over one of my obstructive tales; one of my awkwardly placed literary hurdles on the world's race-course of readers. As a result of his fall he got up, dusted himself thoroughly of his surprise, and actually despatched to me an acknowledgment of his thanks for the happy accident. I replied with a volley of my own thanks, with salvos of praise for him. Now he has written again, throwing wide open his house and his heart, both of which appear to be large and admirably suited to entertain suitable guests.

At this crisis place your careful hands over your careful heart—can you find where it is?

—and draw "a deep, quivering breath," the novelist's conventional breath for the excited heroine. Mr. Blackthorne wishes to know whether there is a *Mrs.* Beverley Sands. If there is, and he feels sure there must be, far-sighted man!—he invites her, invites *us*, *Mrs.* Blackthorne invites *us*, should we sometime be in England, to visit them at their beautiful, far-famed country-house in Warwickshire. If, then, our often postponed marriage, our despairingly postponed marriage, should be arranged to madden me and gladden the rest of mankind before next summer, we could, with our arms around one another's necks, be conveyed by steam and electricity on our wedding journey to the Blackthorne entrance and be there deposited, still oblivious of everything but ourselves.

Think what it would mean to you to be launched upon the rosy sea of English social life amid the orisons and benisons of such illustrious literary personages. Think of those lovely English lawns, raked and rolled for centuries, and of many-coloured *fêtes* on them; of the national tea and the national sandwiches; of national strawberries and clotted cream and clotted crumpets; of Thackeray's

flunkies still flunkying and Queen Anne's fads yet fadding; of week-ends without end—as Mrs. Beverley Sands. Behold yourself growing more and more a celebrity, as the English mutton-chop or sirloined reviewers gradually brought into public appreciation the vague potentialities, not necessarily the bare actualities, of modest young Sands himself. Eventually, no doubt, there would be a day for you at Sandringham with the royal ladies. They would drive you over—I have not the least idea how great the distance is—to drink tea at Stonehenge. Imagine yourself, it having naturally turned into a rainy English afternoon, imagine yourself seated under a heavy black-silk English umbrella on a bare cromlech, the oldest throne in England, tearing at an Anglo-Saxon muffin of purest strain and surrounded by male and female admirers, all under heavy black-silk umbrellas —Spitalsfield, I suppose—as Mrs. Beverley Sands.

Remember, madam, or miss, that this foreign triumph, this career of glory, comes to you strictly from me. To you, of yourself, it is inaccessible. Look upon it as in part the property that I am to settle upon

you at the time of our union—my honours. You have already understood from me that my entire estate, both my real estate and my unreal estate, consists of future honours. Those I have just described are an early payment on the marriage contract—foreign exchange!

What reply, then, in your behalf am I to send to the lofty and benevolent Blackthornes? As matters halt between us—he also loves who only writes and waits—I can merely inform Mr. Blackthorne that there *is* a Mrs. Beverley Sands, but that she persists in remaining a Miss Snowden. With this realisation of what you will lose as Miss Snowden and will gain as Mrs. Sands, do you not think it wise—and wise you are, Tilly—any longer to persist in your persistence? You once, in a moment of weakness, confessed to me—think of your having a moment of weakness!—you once confessed to me, though you may deny it now (Balzac defines woman as the angel or devil who denies everything when it suits her), you once confessed to me that you feared your life would be taken up with two protracted pleasures, each of which curtailed the other: the pleasure of being en-

gaged to me a long time and the pleasure of being married to me a long time. Nerve yourself to shortening the first in order to enter upon the compensations of the second.

Yet remorse racks me even at the prospect of obliterating from the world one whom I first knew and loved in it as Tilly Snowden. Where will Tilly Snowden be when only Mrs. Beverley Sands is left? Where will be that wild rose in a snow bank—the rose which was truly wild, the snow bank which was not cold (or was it?)? I think I should easily become reconciled to your being known, say, as Madame Snowden, so that you might still stand out in your own right and wild-rose individuality. We could visit England as the rising American author, Beverley Sands, and his lovely risen wife, Madame Snowden. Everybody would then be asking who the mysterious Madame Snowden was, and I should relate that she was a retired opera singer—having retired before she advanced.

By the way, you confided to me some time ago that you were not very well. You always *look* well, mighty well to *me*, Tilly. Perfectly well to *me*. Can your indisposition be imaginary? Or is it merely fashionable?

Or—is it something else? What of late has sickened me is an idea of yours that you might sometime consult Doctor G. M. Tilly! Tilly! If you knew the pains that rack me when I think of that charlatan's door being closed behind you as a patient of his!

Tell me it isn't true, and answer about the beautiful Blackthornes!

Your easy and your uneasy

BEVERLEY.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

"Slippery Elm" Apartments,
June 4.

I am perfectly willing, Beverley, to crown you with slippery elm—you seem to think I keep it on hand, dwell in a bower of it—if it is the leaf you sigh for. But please do not try to crown me with a wig of your creative hair; that is, with your literary honours.

How wonderfully the impressions of childhood disappear from memory like breaths on a warm mirror, but long afterwards return to their shapes if the glass be coldly breathed upon! As I read your letter, at least as I read

the very chilly Blackthorne parts of your letter, I remembered, probably for the first time in years, a friend of my mother's.

She had been inveigled to become the wife, that is, the legally installed life-assistant, of an exceedingly popular minister; and when I was a little girl, but not too little to understand—was I ever too little to understand?—she used to slip across the street to our house and in confidence to my mother pour out her sense of humour at the part assigned her by the hired wedding march and evangelical housekeeping. I recall one of those half-whispered, always half-whispered, confidences—for how often in life one feels guilty when telling the truth and innocent when lying!

On this particular morning she and my mother laughed till they were weary, while I danced round them with delight at the idea of having even the tip of my small but very active finger in any pie that savoured of mischief. She had been telling my mother that if, some Sunday, her husband accidentally preached a sermon which brought people into the church, she felt sure of soon receiving a turkey. If he made a rousing plea for foreign missions, she might possibly look out for a pair of ducks.

Her destiny, as she viewed it, was to be merely a strip of worthless territory lying alongside the land of Canaan; people simply walked over her, tramped across her, on their way to Canaan, carrying all sorts of bountiful things to Canaan, her husband.

That childish nonsense comes back to me strangely, and yet not strangely as I think of your funny letter, your very, very funny letter, about the Blackthornes' invitation to *me* because I am not myself but am possibly a Mrs.—well, *some* Mrs. Sands. The English scenes you describe I see but too vividly: it is Canaan and his strip all over again—there on the English lawns; a great many heavy English people are tramping heavily over me on their way to Canaan. The fabulous tea at Sandringham would be Canaan's cup, and at Stonehenge it would be Canaan's muffin that at last choked to death the ill-fated Tilly Snowden.

In order to escape such a fate, Tilly Snowden, then, begs that you will thank the Blackthornes, Mr. and Mrs., as best you can for their invitation; as best she can she thanks you; but for the present, and for how much of the future she does not know, she prefers to

remain what is very necessary to her independence and therefore to her happiness; and also what is quite pleasing to her ear—the wild rose in the snow bank (cold or not cold, according to the sun).

In other words, my dear Beverley, it is true that I have more than once postponed the date of our marriage. I have never said why; perhaps I myself have never known just why. But at least do not expect me to shorten the engagement in order that I may secure some share of your literary honours. As a little girl I always despised queens who were crowned with their husbands. It seemed to me that the queen was crowned with what was left over and was merely allowed to sit on the corner of the throne as the poor connection.

P. S.—Still, I *would* like to go to England. I mean, of course, I wish *we* could go on our wedding journey! If I got ready, could I rely upon *you?* I have always wished to visit England without being debarred from its social life. Seriously, the invitation of the Blackthornes looks to me like an opportunity and an advantage not to be thrown away.

Wisdom never wastes, and you say I am wise!

It is true that I have not been feeling very well. And it is true that I have consulted Dr. Marigold and am now a patient of his. That dreaded door has closed behind me! I have been alone with him! The diagnosis at least was delightful. He made it appear like opening a golden door upon a charming landscape. I had but to step outdoors and look around with a pleasant smile and say: "Why, Health, my former friend, how do you do! Why did you go back on me?" He tells me my trouble is a mild form of auto-intoxication. I said to him *that* must be the disease; namely, that it was *mild*. Never in my life had I had anything that was mild! Disease from my birth up had attacked me only in its most virulent form: so had health. I had always enjoyed—and suffered from—virulent health. I am going to take the Bulgar bacillus.

Why do *you* dislike Dr. Marigold? Popular physicians are naturally hated by unpopular physicians. But how does *he* run against or run over *you?*

Which of your books was it the condescending Englishman liked? Suppose you

send me a copy. Why not send me a copy of each of your books? Those you gave me as they came out seem to have disappeared.

The wild rose is now going to pour down her graceful stalk a tubeful of the Balkan bacillus.

More trouble with the Balkans!

TILLY

(auto-intoxicated, not otherwise intoxicated! Thank Heaven at least for *that!*).

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

June 3.

DEAR BEN:

A bolt of divine lightning has struck me out of the smiling blue, a benign fulmination from an Olympian.

To descend the long slope of Olympus to you. A few days ago I received a letter from the great English novelist, Edward Blackthorne, in praise of my work. The great Edward reads my books and the great Ben Doolittle doesn't—score heavily for the aforesaid illustrious Eddy.

Of course I have for years known that you do not cast your legal or illegal eyes on fiction, though not long ago I heard you admit that you had read "Ten Thousand a Year." On the ground, that it is a lawyer's novel: which is no ground at all, a mere mental bog. My own opinion of why you read it is that you were in search of information how to make the ten thousand! As a literary performance your reading "Ten Thousand a Year" may be likened to the movement of a land-turtle which has crossed to the opposite side of his dusty road to bite off a new kind of weed, waddling along his slow way under the impenetrable roof of his own back.

For, my dear Ben, whom I love and trust as I love and trust no other human being in this world, do you know what I think of you as most truly being? The very finest possible specimen of the highest order of human land-turtle. A land-turtle is a creature that lives under a shovel turned upside down over it, called its back; and a human land-turtle is a fellow who thrives under the roof of the five senses and the practical. Never does a turtle get from under his carapace, and never does the man-turtle get beyond the shovel of his

five senses. Of course you realise that not during our friendship have I paid you so extravagant a compliment. For the human race has to be largely made up of millions of land-turtles. They cause the world to go slowly, and it is the admirable stability of their lives neither to soar nor to sink. You are a land-turtle, Benjamin Doolittle, Esquire; you live under the shell of the practical; that is, you have no imagination; that is, you do not read fiction; that is, you do not read Me! Therefore I harbour no grievance against you, but cherish all the confidence and love in the world for you. But, mind you, only as an unparalleled creeping thing.

To get on with the business of this letter: the English novelist laid aside his enthusiasm for my work long enough to make a request: he asked me to send him some Kentucky ferns for his garden. Owing to my long absence from Kentucky I am no longer in touch with people and things down there. But you left that better land only a few years ago. I recollect that of old you manifested a weakness for sending flowers to womankind—another evidence, by the way, of lack of imagination. Such conduct shows a mere

botanical estimate of the grand passion. The only true lovers, the only real lovers, that women ever have are men of imagination. Why should these men send a common florist's flowers! They grow and offer their own—the roses of Elysium!

To pass on, you must still have clinging to your memory, like bats to a darkened, disused wall, the addresses of various Louisville florists who, by daylight or candlelight and no light at all, were the former emissaries of your folly and your fickleness. Will you send me at once the address of a firm in whose hands I could safely entrust this very high-minded international piece of business?

Inasmuch as you are now a New York lawyer and inasmuch as New York lawyers charge for everything—concentration of mind, if they have any mind, tax on memory and tax on income, their powers of locomotion and of prevarication, club dues and death dues, time and tumult, strikes and strokes, and all other items of haste and waste, you are authorised to regard this letter a professional demand and to let me have a reasonable bill at a not too early date. Charge for whatever you will, but, I charge you, charge me not for

your friendship. "Naught that makes life most worth while can be had for gold." (Rather elegant extract from one of my novels which you disdain to read!)

I shall be greatly obliged if you will let me have an immediate reply.

BEVERLEY.

How is the fair Polly Boles? Still pretending to quarrel? And do you still keep up the pretence?

Predestined magpies!

BEN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

150 Broad Street,
June 5.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

Your highly complimentary and philosophical missive is before my eyes.

You understand French, not I. But I have accumulated a few quotations which I sometimes venture to use in writing, never in my proud oral delivery. If I pronounced to the French the French with which I am familiar, the French themselves would drive their own vernacular out of their land—over

into Germany! Here is one of those fond inaudible phrases:

A chaque oiseau
Son nid est beau.

That is to say, in Greek, every Diogenes prefers his own tub.

The lines are a trophy captured at a college-club dinner the other night. One of the speakers launched the linguistic marvel on the blue cloud of smoke and it went bumping around the heads of the guests without finding any head to enter, like a cork bobbing about the edges of a pond, trying in vain to strike a place to land. But everybody cheered uproariously, made happy by the discovery that someone actually could say something at a New York dinner that nobody had heard before. One man next to the speaker (of course coached beforehand) passed a translation to his elbow neighbour. It made its way down the table to me at the other end and I, in the New York way, laid it up for future use at a dinner in some other city. Meantime I use it now on you.

It is true that I arrived in New York from Kentucky some years ago. It is likewise un-

deniable that for some years previous thereto I had dealings with Louisville florists. But I affirm now, and all these variegated gentlemen, if they *are* gentlemen, would gladly come on to New York as my witnesses and bear me out in the joyful affidavit, that whatever folly or recklessness or madness marked my behaviour, never once did I commit the futility, the imbecility, of trafficking in ferns.

A great English novelist—ferns! A rising young American novelist—ferns! Frogstools, mushrooms, fungi! Man alive, why don't you ship him a dray-load of Kentucky spiderwebs? Or if they should be too gross for his delicate soul, a birdcage containing a pair of warbling young bluegrass moonbeams?

I am a *land*-turtle, am I? If it be so, thank God! If I have no imagination, thank God! If I live and move and have my being under the shovel of the five senses and of the practical, thank God! But, my good fellow, whom I love and trust as I love and trust no other man, if I am a turtle, do you know what I think of you as most truly being?

A poor, harmless tinker.

You, with your pastime of fabricating novels, dwell in a little workshop of the

imagination; you tinker with what you are pleased to call human lives, reality, truth. On your shop door should hang a sign to catch the eye: "Tinkering done here. Noble, splendid tinkering. No matter who you are, what your past career or present extremity, come in and let the owner of this shop make your acquaintance and he will work you over into something finer than you have ever been or in this world will ever be. For he will make you into an unfallen original or into a perfected final. If you have never had a chance to do your best in life, he will give you that chance in a story. All unfortunates, all the broken-down, especially welcome. Everybody made over to be as everybody should be by Beverley Sands."

But, brother, the sole thing with which you, the tinker, do business is the sole thing with which I, the turtle, do not do business. I, as a lawyer, cannot tamper with human life, actuality, truth. During the years that I have been an attorney never have I had a case in court without first of all things looking for the element of imagination in it and trying to stamp that element out of the case and kick it out of the courtroom: that lurking scoundrel,

that indefatigable mischief-maker, your beautiful and beloved patron power—imagination.

Going on to testify out of my experience as a land-turtle, I depose the following, having kissed the Bible, to wit: that during the turtle's travels he sooner or later crosses the tracks of most of the other animal creatures and gets to know them and their ways. But there is one path of one creature marked for unique renown among nose-bearing men: that of a graceful, agile, little black-and-white piece of soft-furred nocturnal innocence—surnamed the polecat.

Now the imagination, as long as it is favourably disposed, may in your profession be the harmless bird of paradise or whatever winged thing you will that soars innocently toward bright skies; but, once unkindly disposed, it is in my profession, and in every other, the polecat of the human faculties. When it has testified against you, it vanishes from the scene, but the whole atmosphere reeks with its testimony.

Hence it is that I go gunning first for this same little animal whose common den is the lawsuit. His abode is everywhere, though you never seem to have encountered him in

your work and walks. If you should do so, if you should ever run into the polecat of a hostile imagination, oh, then, my dear fellow, may the land-turtle be able to crawl to you and stand by you in that hour!

But—the tinker to his work, the turtle to his! *A chaque oiseau!* Diogenes, your tub!

As to the fern business, I'll inquire of Polly. I paid for the flowers, *she* got them. Anybody can receive money for blossoms, but only a statesman and a Christian, I suppose, can fill an order for flowers with equity and fresh buds. Go ahead and try Phillips & Faulds. You could reasonably rely upon them to fill any order that you might place in their hands, however nonsensical-comical, billy-goatian-satirical it may be. They'd send your Englishman an opossum with a pouch full of blooming hyacinths if that would quiet his longing and make him happy. I should think it might.

We are, sir, your obliged counsel and turtle,

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

How is the fair Tilly Snowden? Still cooing? Are you still cooing?

Uncertain doves!

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

150 Broad Street,
June 5.

DEAR POLLY:

I send you some red roses to go with your black hair and your black eyes, never so black as when black with temper. When may I come to see you? Why not to-morrow night?

Another matter, not so vital but still important: a few years before we left Louisville to seek our fortunes (and misfortunes) in New York, I at different times employed divers common carriers known as florists to convey to you inflammatory symbols of those emotions that could not be depicted in writing fluid. In other words, I hired those mercenaries to impress my infatuation upon you in terms of their costliest, most sensational merchandise. You should be prepared to say which of these florists struck you as the best business agent.

Would you send me the address of that man or of that firm? Immediately you will want to know why. Always suspicious! Let the

suspicions be quieted; it is not I, it is Beverley. Some foggy-headed Englishman has besought him to ship him (the foggy one) some Kentucky vegetation all the way across the broad Atlantic to his wet domain—interlocking literary idiots! Beverley appeals to me, I to you, the highest court in everything.

Are you still enjoying the umbrageous society of that giraffe-headed jackass, Doctor Claude Mullen? Can you still tolerate his unimpassioned propinquity and futile gyrations? *He* a nerve specialist! The only nerve in his practice is *his* nerve. Doesn't my love satisfy you? Isn't there enough of it? Isn't it the right kind? Will it ever give out?

Your reply, then, will cover four points: to thank me for the red roses; to say when I may come to see you; to send me the address of the Louisville florist who became most favourably known to you through a reckless devotion; and to explain your patience with that unhappy fool.

Thy sworn and thy swain,

Ben Doolittle.

POLLY BOLES TO BEN DOOLITTLE

The Franklin Flats,
June 6.

My dear Ben:

Your writing to me for the name of a Louisville florist is one of your flimsiest subterfuges. What you wished to receive from me was a letter of reassurance. You were disagreeable on your last visit and you have since been concerned as to how I felt about it afterwards. Now you try to conciliate me by invoking my aid as indispensable. That is like you men! If one of you can but make a woman forget, if he can but lead her to forgive him, by flattering her with the idea that she is indispensable! And that is like woman! I see her figure standing on the long road of time: dumbly, patiently standing there, waiting for some male to pass along and permit her to accompany him as his indispensable fellow-traveller. I am now to be put in a good humour by being honoured with your request that I supply you with the name of a florist.

Well, you poor, uninformed Ben, I'll supply you. All the Louisville florists, as I thought

at the time, carried out their instructions faithfully; that is, from each I occasionally received flowers not fresh. Did it occur to me to blame the florists? Never! I did what a woman always does: she thinks less of—well, she doesn't think less of the *florist!*

Be this as it may, Beverley might try Phillips & Faulds for whatever he is to export. As nearly as I now remember they sent the biggest boxes of whatever you ordered!

I have an appointment for to-morrow night, but I think I can arrange to divide the evening, giving you the later half. It shall be for you to say whether the best half was *yours*. That will depend upon *you*.

I still enjoy the "umbrageous society" of Dr. Claude Mullen because he loves me and I do not love him. The fascination of his presence lies in my indifference. Perhaps women are so seldom safe with the men who love them, that any one of us feels herself entitled to make the most of a rare chance! I am not only safe, I am entertained. As I go down into the parlour, I almost feel that I ought to buy a ticket to a performance in my own private theatre.

Ben, dear, are you going to commit the

folly of being jealous? If I had to marry *him*, do you know what my first wifely present would be? A liberal transfusion of my own blood! As soon as I enter the room, what fascinates me are his lower eyelids, which hold little cupfuls of sentimental fluid. I am always expecting the little pools to run over: then there would be tears. The night he goes for good—perhaps they will be tears that night.

If you ask me how can I, if I feel thus about him, still encourage his visits, I have simply to say that I don't know. When it comes to what a woman will "receive" in such cases, the ground she walks on is very uncertain to her own feet. It may be that the one thing she forever craves and forever fears not to get is absolute certainty, certainty that some day love for her will not be over, everything be not ended she knows not why. Dr. Mullen's love is pitiful, and as long as a man's love is pitiful at least a woman can be sure of it. Therefore he is irresistible—as my guest!

The roses are glorious. I bury my face in them down to the thorns. And then I come over and sign my name as the indispensable

POLLY BOLES.

POLLY BOLES TO TILLY SNOWDEN

June 6.

DEAR TILLY:

I have had a note from Beverley, asking whether he could come this evening. I have written that I have an appointment, but I did not enlighten him as to the appointment being *with you.* Why not let him suffer awhile? I will explain afterwards. I told him that I could perhaps arrange to divide the evening; would you mind? And would you mind coming early? I will do as much for you some time, and *I suspect I couldn't do more!*

P. S.—Rather than come for the first half of the evening perhaps you would prefer to *postpone* your visit *altogether.* It would suit me just as well; *better* in fact. There really was something very *particular*, Tilly dear, that I wanted to talk to Ben about to-night.

I shall not look for you at all *this* evening, *best* of friends.

POLLY BOLES.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO POLLY BOLES

June 6.

DEAR POLLY:

The very particular something to talk to Ben about to-night is the identical something for every other night. And nothing could be more characteristic of you, as soon as you heard that my visit would clash with one of his, than your eagerness to push me partly out of the house in a hurried letter and then push me completely out in a quiet postscript. Being a woman, I understand your temptation and your tactics. I fully sympathise with you.

Continue in ease of mind, my most trusted intimate. I shall not drop in to interrupt you and Ben—both not so young as you once were and both getting stout—heavy Polly, heavy Ben—as you sit side by side in your little Franklin Flat parlour. That parlour always suggests to me an enormous turnip hollowed out square: with no windows; with a hole on one side to come in and a hole on the other side to go out; upholstered in enormous bunches of beets and horse-radish, and lighted with a wilted electric sunflower. There you

two will sit to-night, heavy Polly, heavy Ben, suffocating for fresh air and murmuring to each other as you have murmured for years:

"I do! I do!"

"I do! I do!"

One sentence in your letter, Polly dear, takes your photograph like a camera; the result is a striking likeness. That sentence is this:

"Why not let him suffer awhile? I will explain afterwards."

That is exactly what you will do, what you would always do: explain afterwards. In other words, you plot to make Ben jealous but fear to make him too jealous lest he desert you. If on the evening of this visit you should forget "to explain," and if during the night you should remember, you would, if need were, walk barefoot through the streets in your nightgown and tap on his window-shutter, if you could reach it, and say: "Ben, that appointment wasn't with any other man; it was with Tilly. I could not sleep until I had told you!"

That is, you have already disposed of yourself, breath and soul, to Ben; and while you are waiting for the marriage ceremony, you have espoused in his behalf what you consider

your best and strongest trait—loyalty. Under the goadings of this vampire trait you will, a few years after marriage, have devoured all there is of Ben alive and will have taken your seat beside what are virtually his bones. As the years pass, the more ravenously you will preside over the bones. Never shall the world say that Polly Boles was disloyal to whatever was left of her dear Ben Doolittle!

Your loyalty! I believe the first I saw of it was years ago one night in Louisville when you and I were planning to come to New York to live. Naturally we were much concerned by the difficulties of choosing our respective New York residences and we had written on and had received thumb-nailed libraries of romance about different places. As you looked over the recommendations of each, you came upon one called The Franklin Flats. The circular contained appropriate quotations from Poor Richard's Almanac. I remember how your face brightened as you said: "This ought to be the very thing." One of the quotations on the circular ran somewhat thus: "Beware of meat twice boiled"; and you said in consequence: "So they must have a good restaurant!"

In other words, you believed that a house named after Franklin could but resemble Franklin. A building put up in New York by a Tammany contractor, if named after Benjamin Franklin and advertised with quotations from Franklin's works, would embody the traits of that remote national hero! To your mind—not to your imagination, for you haven't any—to your mind, and you have a great deal of mind, the bell-boys, the superintendent, the scrub woman, the chambermaids, the flunkied knave who stands at the front door—all these were loyally congregated as about a beloved mausoleum. You are still in the Franklin Flats! I know what you have long suffered there; but move away! Not Polly Boles. She will be loyal to the building as long as the building stands by the contractor and the contractor stands by profits and losses.

While on the subject of loyalty, not your loyalty but woman's loyalty, I mean to finish with it. And I shall go on to say that occasionally I have sat behind a plate-glass window in some Fifth Avenue shop and have studied woman's organised loyalty, unionised loyalty, standardised loyalty. This takes

effect in those processions that now and then sweep up the Avenue as though they were Crusaders to the Holy Sepulchre. The marchers try first not to look self-conscious; all try, secondly, to look devoted to "the cause." But beneath all other expressions and differences of expression I have always seen one reigning look as plainly as though it were printed in enormous letters on a banner flying over their heads:

"Strictly Monogamous Women."

At such times I have felt a wild desire, when I should hear of the next parade, to organise a company of unenthralled young girls who with unfettered natures and unfettered features should tramp up the Avenue under their own colours. If the women before them—those loyal ones—would actually carry, as they should, a banner with the legend I have described, then my company of girls should unfurl to the breeze their flag with the truth blazoned on it:

"Not Necessarily Monogamous!"

The honest human crowd, watching and applauding us, would pack the Avenue from sidewalks to roofs.

Between you and me everything seems to

be summed up in one difference: all my life I have wanted to go barefoot and all your life, no matter what the weather, you have been solicitous to put on goloshes.

My very nature is rooted in rebellion that in a world alive and running over with irresistible people, a woman must be doomed to find her chief happiness in just one! The heart going out to so many in succession, and the hand held by one; year after year your hand held by the first man who impulsively got possession of it. Every instinct of my nature would be to jerk my hand away and be free! To give it again and again.

This subject weighs crushingly on me as I struggle with this letter because I have tidings for you about myself. I am to write words which I have long doubted I should ever write, life's most iron-bound words. Polly, I suppose I am going to be married at last. Of course it is Beverley. Not without waverings, not without misgivings. But I'd feel those, be the man whoever he might. Why I feel thus I do not know, but I know I feel. I tell you this first because it was you who brought Beverley and me together, who have always believed in his career. (Though

I think that of late you have believed more in him and less in me.) I, too, am beginning to believe in his career. He has lately ascertained that his work is making a splendid impression in England. If he succeeds in England, he will succeed in this country. He has received an invitation to visit some delightful and very influential people in England and "to bring me along!" Think of anybody bringing *me* along! If we should be entertained by these people [they are the Blackthornes], such is English social life, that we should also get to know the white Thornes and the red Thornes—the whole social forest. The iron rule of my childhood was economy; and the influence of that iron rule over me is inexorable still: I cannot even contemplate such prodigal wastage in life as not to accept this invitation and gather in its wealth of consequences.

More news of me, very, very important: *at last* I have made the acquaintance of George Marigold. I have become one of his patients.

Beverley is furious. I enclose a letter from him. You need not return it. I shall not answer it. I shall leave things to his imagination and his imagination will give him no rest.

If Ben hurled at *you* a jealous letter about Dr. Mullen, you would immediately write to remove his jealousy. You would even ridicule Dr. Mullen to win greater favour in Ben's eyes. That is, you would do an abominable thing, never doubting that Ben would admire you the more. And you would be right; for as Ben observed you tear Dr. Mullen to pieces to feed his vanity, he would lean back in his chair and chuckle within himself: "Glorious, staunch old Polly!"

And what you would do in this instance you will do all your life: you will practise disloyalty to every other human being, as in this letter you have practised it with me, for the sake of loyalty to Ben: your most pronounced, most horrible trait.

TILLY SNOWDEN.

POLLY BOLES TO TILLY SNOWDEN

June 7.

DEAR TILLY:

I return Beverley's letter. Without comment, since I did not read it. You know how I love Beverley, respect him, believe in him. I have a feeling for him unlike that for any

other human being, not even Ben; I look upon him as set apart and sacred because he has genius and belongs to the world.

As for his faults, those that I have not already noticed I prefer to find out for myself. I have never cared to discover any human being's failings through a third person. Instead of getting acquainted with the pardonable traits of the abused, I might really be introduced to the *abominable traits of the abuser.*

Once more, you think you are going to marry Beverley! I shall reserve my congratulations for the *event itself.*

Thank you for surrendering your claim on my friendship and society last night. Ben and I had a most satisfactory evening, and when not suffocating we murmured "I do" to our hearts' content.

Next time, should your visits clash, I'll push *him* out. Yet I feel in honour bound to say that this is only my present state of mind. I might weaken at the last moment—even in the Franklin Flats.

As to some things in your letter, I have long since learned not to bestow too much attention upon anything you say. You court a

kind of irresponsibility in language. With your inborn and over-indulged willfulness you love to break through the actual and to revel in the imaginary. I have become rather used to this as one of your growing traits and I am therefore not surprised that in this letter you say things which, if seriously spoken, would insult your sex and would make them recoil from you—or make them wish to burn you at the stake. When you march up Fifth Avenue with your company of girls in that kind of procession, there will not be any Fifth Avenue: you will be tramping through the slums where you belong.

All this, I repeat, is merely your way—to take things out in talking. But we can make words our playthings in life's shallows until words wreck us as their playthings in life's deeps.

Still, in return for your compliments to me, *which, of course, you really mean*, I paid you one the other night when thinking of you quite by myself. It was this: nature seems to leave something out of each of us, but we presently discover that she perversely put it where it does not belong.

What she left out of you, my dear, was the

domestic tea-kettle. There isn't even any place for one. But she made up for lack of the kettle *by rather overdoing the stove!*

Your *discreet* friend,

POLLY BOLES.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO PHILLIPS & FAULDS

Cathedral Heights, New York,
June 7, 1900.

GENTLEMEN:

A former customer of yours, Mr. Benjamin Doolittle, has suggested your firm as reliable agents to carry out an important commission, which I herewith describe:

I enclose a list of Kentucky ferns. I desire you to make a collection of these ferns and to ship them, expenses prepaid, to Edward Blackthorne, Esquire, King Alfred's Wood, Warwickshire, England. The cost is not to exceed twenty-five dollars. To furnish you the needed guarantee, as well as to avoid unnecessary correspondence, I herewith enclose, payable to your order, my check for that amount.

Will you let me have a prompt reply, stating

whether you will undertake this commission and see it through?

Very truly yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS.

PHILLIPS & FAULDS TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Louisville, Ky.,
June 10, 1900.

DEAR SIR:

Your valued letter with check for $25 received. We handle most of the ferns on the list, and know the others and can easily get them.

You may rely upon your valued order receiving the best attention. Thanking you for the same,

Yours very truly,
PHILLIPS & FAULDS.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO EDWARD BLACKTHORNE

Cathedral Heights, New York,
June 15, 1910.

MY DEAR MR. BLACKTHORNE:

Your second letter came into the port of my life like an argosy from a rich land. I think you must have sent it with some re-

membrance of your own youth, or out of your mature knowledge of youth itself; how too often it walks the shore of its rocky world, cutting its bare feet on sharp stones, as it strains its eyes toward things far beyond its horizon but not beyond its faith and hope. Some day its ship comes in and it sets sail toward the distant ideal. How much the opening of the door of your friendship, of your life, means to me! A new consecration envelops the world that I am to be the guest of a great man. If words do not say more, it is because words say so little.

Delay has been unavoidable in any mere formal acknowledgment of your letter. You spoke in it of the hinges of a book. My silence has been due to the arrangement of hinges for the shipment of the ferns. I wished to insure their safe transoceanic passage and some inquiries had to be made in Kentucky.

You may rely upon it that the matter will receive the best attention. In good time the ferns, having reached the end of their journey, will find themselves put down in your garden as helpless immigrants. From what outlook I can obtain upon the scene of their reception,

they should lack only hands to reach confidingly to you and lack only feet to run with all their might away from Hodge.

I acknowledge—with the utmost thanks—the unusual and beautiful courtesy of Mrs. Blackthorne's and your invitation to my wife, if I have one, and to me. It is the dilemma of my life, at the age of twenty-seven, to be obliged to say that such a being as Mrs. Sands exists, but that nevertheless there is no such person.

Can you imagine a man's stretching out his hand to pluck a peach and just before he touched the peach, finding only the bough of the tree? Then, as from disappointment he was about to break off the offensive bough, seeing again the dangling peach? Can you imagine this situation to be of long continuance, during which he could neither take hold of the peach nor let go of the tree—nor go away? If you can, you will understand what I mean when I say that my bride persists in remaining unwed and I persist in wooing. I do not know why; she protests that she does not know; but we do know that life is short, love shorter, that time flies, and we are not husband and wife.

If she remains undecided when Summer returns, I hope Mrs. Blackthorne and you will let me come alone.

Thus I can thank you with certainty for one with the hope that I may yet thank you for two.

I am,

Sincerely yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS.

P. S.—Can you pardon the informality of a postscript?

As far as I can see clearly into a cloudy situation, marriage is denied me on account of the whole unhappy history of woman—which is pretty hard. But a good many American ladies—the one I woo among them—are indignant just now that they are being crowded out of their destinies by husbands—or even possibly by bachelors. These ladies deliver lectures to one another with discontented eloquence and rouse their auditresses to feministic frenzy by reminding them that for ages woman has walked in the shadow of man and that the time has come for the worm

[the woman] to turn on the shadow or to crawl out of it.

My dear Mr. Blackthorne, I need hardly say that the only two shadows I could ever think of casting on the woman I married would be that of my umbrella whenever it rained, and that of her parasol whenever the sun shone. But I do maintain that if there is not enough sunshine for the men and women in the world, if there has to be some casting of shadows in the competition and the crowding, I do maintain that the casting of the shadow would better be left to the man. He has had long training, terrific experience, in this mortal business of casting the shadow, has learned how to moderate it and to hold it steady! The woman at least knows where it is to be found, should she wish to avail herself of it. But what would be the state of a man in his need of his spouse's penumbra? He would be out of breath with running to keep up with the penumbra or to find where it was for the time being!

I have seen some of these husbands who live—or have gradually died out—in the shadow of their wives; they are nature's subdued farewell to men and gentlemen.

DIARY OF BEVERLEY SANDS

June 16.

A remarkable thing has lately happened to me.

One of my Kentucky novels, upon being republished in London some months ago, fell into the hands of a sympathetic reviewer. This critic's praise later made its way to the stately library of Edward Blackthorne. What especially induced the latter to read the book, I infer, were lines quoted by the reviewer from my description of a woodland scene with ferns in it: the mighty novelist, as it happens, is himself interested in ferns. He consequently wrote to some other English authors and critics, calling attention to my work, and he sent a letter to me, asking for some ferns for his garden.

This recognition in England hilariously affected my friends over here. Tilly, whose mind suggests to me a delicately poised pair of golden balances for weighing delight against delight (always her most vital affair), when this honour for me fell into the scales, found them inclined in my favour. If it be true, as I have often thought, that she has long been

holding on to me merely until she could take sure hold of someone else of more splendid worldly consequence, she suddenly at least tightened her temporary grasp. Polly, good, solid Polly, wholesome and dependable as a well-browned whole-wheat baker's loaf weighing a hundred and sixty pounds, when she heard of it, gave me a Bohemian supper in her Franklin Flat parlour, inviting only a few undersized people, inasmuch as she and Ben, the chief personages of the entertainment, took up most of the room. We were so packed in, that literally it was a night in Bohemia *aux sardines*.

Since the good news from England came over, Ben, with his big, round, clean-shaven, ruddy face and short, reddish curly hair, which makes him look like a thirty-five-year-old Bacchus who had never drunk a drop—even Ben has beamed on me like a mellower orb. He is as ashamed as ever of my books, but is beginning to feel proud that so many more people are being fooled by them. Several times lately I have caught his eyes resting on me with an expression of affectionate doubt as to whether after all he might be mistaken in not having thought more of me.

But he dies hard. My publisher, who is a human refrigerator containing a mental thermometer, which rises or falls toward like or dislike over a background for book-sales, got wind of the matter and promptly invited me to one of his thermometric club-lunches—always an occasion for acute gastritis.

Rumour of my fame has permeated my club, where, of course, the leading English reviews are kept on file. Some of the members must have seen the favourable criticisms. One night I became aware as I passed through the rooms that club heroes seated here and there threw glances of fresh interest toward me and exchanged auspicious words. The president—who for so long a time has styled himself the Nestor of the club that he now believes it is the members who do this, the garrulous old president, whose weaknesses have made holes in him through which his virtues sometimes leak out and get away, met me under the main chandelier and congratulated me in tones so intentionally audible that they violated the rules but were not punishable under his personal privileges.

There was a sinister incident: two members whom Ben and I wish to kick because they

have had the audacity to make the acquaintance of Tilly and Polly, and whom we despise also because they are fashionable charlatans in their profession—these two with dark looks saw the president congratulate me.

More good fortune yet to come! The ferns which I am sending Mr. Blackthorne will soon be growing in his garden. The illustrious man has many visitors; he leads them, if he likes, to his fern bank. "These," he will some day say, "came from Christine Nilsson. These are from Barbizon in memory of Corot. These were sent me by Turgenieff. And these," he will add, turning to his guests, "these came from a young American novelist, a Kentuckian, whose work I greatly respect: you must read his books." The guests separate to their homes to pursue the subject. Spreading fame—may it spread! Last of all, the stirring effect of this on me, who now run toward glory as Anacreon said Cupid ran toward Venus—with both feet and wings.

The ironic fact about all this commotion affecting so many solid, substantial people—the ironic fact is this:

There was no woodland scene and there were no ferns.

Here I reach the curious part of my story.

When I was a country lad of some seventeen years in Kentucky, one August afternoon I was on my way home from a tramp of several miles. My course lay through patches of woods—last scant vestiges of the primeval forest—and through fields garnered of summer grain or green with the crops of coming autumn. Now and then I climbed a fence and crossed an old woods-pasture where stock grazed.

The August sky was clear and the sun beat down with terrific heat. I had been walking for hours and parching thirst came upon me.

This led me to remember how once these rich uplands had been the vast rolling forest that stretched from far-off eastern mountains to far-off western rivers, and how under its shade, out of the rock, everywhere bubbled crystal springs. A land of swift forest streams diamond bright, drinking places of the bold game.

The sun beat down on me in the treeless open field. My feet struck into a path. It, too, became a reminder: it had once been a trail of the wild animals of that verdurous

wilderness. I followed its windings—a sort of gully—down a long, gentle slope. The windings had no meaning now: the path could better have been straight; it was devious because the feet that first marked it off had threaded their way crookedly hither and thither past the thick-set trees.

I reached the spring—a dry spot under the hot sun; no tree overshadowing it, no vegetation around it, not a blade of grass; only dust in which were footprints of the stock which could not break the habit of coming to it but quenched their thirst elsewhere. The bulged front of some limestone rock showed where the ancient mouth of the spring had been. Enough moisture still trickled forth to wet a few clods. Hovering over these, rising and sinking, a little quivering jet of gold, a flock of butterflies. The grey stalk of a single dead weed projected across the choked orifice of the fountain and one long, brown grasshopper —spirit of summer dryness—had crawled out to the edge and sat motionless.

A few yards away a young sycamore had sprung up from some wind-carried seed. Its grey-green leaves threw a thin scarred shadow on the dry grass and I went over and lay

down under it to rest—my eyes fixed on the forest ruin.

Years followed with their changes. I being in New York with my heart set on building whatever share I could of American literature upon Kentucky foundations, I at work on a novel, remembered that hot August afternoon, the dry spring, and in imagination restored the scene as it had been in the Kentucky of the pioneers.

I now await with eagerness all further felicities that may originate in a woodland scene that did not exist. What else will grow for me out of ferns that never grew?

PART SECOND

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

King Alfred's Wood,
Warwickshire, England,
May 1, 1911.

DEAR SIR:

It is the first of the faithful leafy May again. I sit at my windows as on this day a year ago and look out with thankfulness upon what a man may call the honour of the vegetable world.

A year ago to-day I, misled by a book of yours or by some books—for I believe I read more than one of them—I, betrayed by the phrase that when we touch a book we touch a man, overstepped the boundaries of caution as to having any dealings with glib, plausible strangers and wrote you a letter. I made a request of you in that letter. I thought the request bore with it a suitable reward: that I should be grateful if you would undertake to have some ferns sent to me for my collection.

Your sleek reply led me still further astray and I wrote again. I drew my English cloak from my shoulders and spread it on the ground for you to step on. I threw open to you the doors of my hospitality, good-fellowship.

That was last May. Now it is May again. And now I know to a certainty what for months I have been coming to realise always with deeper shame: that you gave me your word and did not keep your word; doubtless never meant to keep it.

Why, then, write you about this act of dishonour now? How justify a letter to a man I feel obliged to describe as I describe you?

The reason is this, if you can appreciate such a reason. My nature refuses to let go a half-done deed. I remain annoyed by an abandoned, a violated, bond. Once in a wood I came upon a partly chopped-down tree, and I must needs go far and fetch an axe and finish the job. What I have begun to build I must build at till the pattern is wrought out. Otherwise I should weaken, soften, lose the stamina of resolution. The upright moral skeleton within me would decay and crumble and I should sink down and flop like a human frog.

Since, then, you dropped the matter in

your way—without so much as a thought of a man's obligation to himself—I dismiss it in my way—with the few words necessary to enable me to rid my mind of it and of such a character.

I wish merely to say, then, that I despise as I despise nothing else the ragged edge of a man's behaviour. I put your conduct before you in this way: do you happen to know of a common cabbage in anybody's truck patch? Observe that not even a common cabbage starts out to do a thing and fails to do it if it can. You must have some kind of perception of an oak tree. Think what would become of human beings in houses if builders were deceived as to the trusty fibre of sound oak? Do you ever see a grape-vine? Consider how it takes hold and will not be shaken loose by the capricious compelling winds. In your country have you the plover? Think what would be the plover's fate, if it did not steer straight through time and space to a distant shore. Why, some day pick up merely a piece of common quartz. Study its powers of crystallisation. And reflect that a man ranks high or low in the scale of character according to his possession or his lack of the

powers of crystallisation. If the forces of his mind can assume fixity around an idea, if they can adjust themselves unalterably about a plan, expect something of him. If they run through his hours like water, if memory is a millstream, if remembrance floats forever away, expect nothing.

Simple, primitive folk long ago interpreted for themselves the characters of familiar plants about them. Do you know what to them the fern stood for? The fern stood for Fidelity. Those true, constant souls would have said that you had been unfaithful even with nature's emblems of Fidelity.

The English sky is clear to-day. The sunlight falls in a white radiance on my plants. I sit at my windows with my grateful eyes on honest out-of-doors. There is a shadow on a certain spot in the garden; I dislike to look at it. There is a shadow on the place where your books once stood on my library shelves. Your specious books!—your cleverly manufactured books!—but there are successful scamps in every profession.

I am,

Very truly yours,

Edward Blackthorne.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO EDWARD BLACKTHORNE

Cathedral Heights,
May 10, 1911.

DEAR SIR:

I wish to inform you that I have just received from you a letter in which you attack my character. I wish in reply further to inform you that I have never felt called upon to defend my character. Nor will I, even with this letter of yours as evidence, attack your character.

I am,

Very truly yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

May 13, 1911.

DEAR BEN:

I ask your attention to the enclosed letter from Mr. Edward Blackthorne. By way of contrast and also of reminder, lest you may have forgotten, I send you two other letters received from him last year. I shared with you at the time the agreeable purport of these

earlier letters. This last letter came three days ago and for three days I have been trying to quiet down sufficiently even to write to you about it. At last I am able to do so.

You will see that Mr. Blackthorne has never received the ferns. Then where have they been all this time? I took it for granted that they had been shipped. The order was last spring placed with the Louisville firm recommended by you. They guaranteed the execution of the order. I forwarded to them my cheque. They cashed my cheque. The voucher was duly returned to me cancelled through my bank. I could not suppose they would take my cheque unless they had shipped the plants. They even wrote me again in the Autumn of their own accord, stating that the ferns were about to be sent on—Autumn being the most favourable season. Then where are the ferns?

I felt so sure of their having reached Mr. Blackthorne that I harboured a certain grievance and confess that I tried to make generous allowance for him as a genius in his never having acknowledged their arrival.

I have demanded of Phillips & Faulds an immediate explanation. As soon as they reply

I shall let you hear further. The fault may be with them; in the slipshod Southern way they may have been negligent. My cheque may even have gone as a bridal present to some junior member of the firm or to help pay the funeral expenses of the senior member.

There is trouble somewhere behind and I think there is trouble ahead.

Premonitions are for nervous or over-sanguine ladies; but if some lady will kindly lend me one of her premonitions, I shall admit that I have it and on the strength of it—or the weakness—declare my belief that the mystery of the ferns is going to uncover some curious and funny things.

As to the rest of Mr. Blackthorne's letter: after these days of turbulence, I have come to see my way clear to interpret it thus: a great man, holding a great place in the world, offered his best to a stranger and the stranger, as the great man believes, turned his back on it. That is the grievance, the insult. If anything could be worse, it is my seeming discourtesy to Mrs. Blackthorne, since the invitation came also from her. In a word, here is a genius who strove to advance my work and me, and he feels himself outraged in his

kindness, his hospitality, his friendship and his family—in all his best.

But of course that is the hardest of all human things to stand. Men who have treated each other but fairly well or even badly in ordinary matters often in time become friends. But who of us ever forgives the person that slights our best? Out of a rebuff like that arises such life-long unforgiveness, estrangement, hatred, that Holy Writ itself doubtless for this very reason took pains to issue its warning—no pearls before swine! And perhaps of all known pearls a great native British pearl is the most prized by its British possessor!

The reaction, then, from Mr. Blackthorne's best has been his worst: if I did not merit his best, I deserve his worst; hence his last letter. God have mercy on the man who deserved that letter! You will have observed that his leading trait as revealed in all his letters is enormous self-love. That's because he is a genius. Genius *has* to have enormous self-love. Beware the person who has none! Without self-love no one ever wins any other's love.

Thus the mighty English archer with his

mighty bow shot his mighty arrow—but at an innocent person.

Still the arrow of this letter, though it misses me, kills my plans. The first trouble will be Tilly. Our marriage had been finally fixed for June, and our plans embraced a wedding journey to England and the acceptance of the invitation of the Blackthornes. The prospect of this wonderful English summer—I might as well admit it—was one thing that finally steadied all her wavering as to marriage.

Now the disappointment: no Blackthornes, no English celebrities to greet us as American celebrities, no courtesies from critics, no lawns, no tea nor toast nor being toasted. Merely two unknown, impoverished young Yankee tourists, trying to get out of chilly England what can be gotten by anybody with a few, a very few, dollars.

But Tilly dreads disappointment as she dreads disease. To her disappointment *is* a disease in the character of the person who inflicts the disappointment. Once I tried to get you to read one of Balzac's masterpieces, *The Magic Skin*. I told you enough about it to enable you to understand what I now say:

that ever since I became engaged to Tilly I have been to her as a magic skin which, as she cautiously watches it, has always shrunk a little whenever I have encountered a defeat or brought her a disappointment. No later success, on the contrary, ever re-expands the shrunken skin: it remains shrunken where each latest disappointment has left it.

Now when I tell her of my downfall and the collapse of the gorgeous summer plans!

BEVERLEY
(the Expanding Scamp and the
Shrinking Skin).

BEN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 14th.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

I have duly pondered the letters you send.

"Fie, fee, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman!"

If you do not mind, I shall keep these documents from him in my possession. And suppose you send me all later letters, whether from him or from anyone else, that bear on

this matter. It begins to grow interesting and I believe it will bear watching. Make me, then, as your lawyer, the custodian of all pertinent and impertinent papers. They can go into the locker where I keep your immortal but impecunious Will. Some day I might have to appear in court, I with my shovel and five senses and no imagination, to plead *une cause célèbre* (a little more of my scant intimate French).

The explanation I give of this gratuitously insulting letter is that at last you have run into a hostile human imagination in the person of an old literary polecat, an aged book-skunk. Of course if I could decorate my style after the manner of your highly creative gentlemen, I might say that you had unwarily crossed the nocturnal path of his touchy moonlit mephitic highness.

I am not surprised, of course, that this letter has caused you to think still more highly of its writer. I tell you that is your profession—to tinker—to turn reality into something better than reality.

Some day I expect to see you emerge from your shop with a fish story. Intending buyers will find that you have entered deeply into

the ideals and difficulties of the man-eating shark: how he could not swim freely for whales in his track and could not breathe freely for minnows in his mouth; how he got pinched from behind by the malice of the lobster and got shocked on each side by the eccentricities of the eel. The other fish did not appreciate him and he grew embittered—and then only began to bite. You will make over the actual shark and exhibit him to your reader as the ideal shark—a kind of beloved disciple of the sea, the St. John of fish.

Anything imaginative that you might make out of a shark would be a minor achievement compared with what you have done for this Englishman. Might the day come, the avenging day, when Benjamin Doolittle could get a chance to write him just one letter! May the god of battles somehow bring about a meeting between the middle-aged land-turtle and the aged skunk! On that field of Mars somebody's fur will have to fly and it will not be the turtle's, for he hasn't any.

You speak of a trouble that looms up in your love affair: let it loom. The nearer it looms, the better for you. I have repeatedly warned you that you have bound your life

and happiness to the wrong person, and the person is constantly becoming worse. Detach your apparatus of dreams at last from her. Take off your glorious rainbow world-goggles and see the truth before it is too late.

Do not fail, unless you object, to send me all letters incoming about the ferns—those now celebrated bushes.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

PHILLIPS & FAULDS TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 13, 1911.

DEAR SIR:

We acknowledge receipt of your letter of May 10 relative to an order for ferns.

It is decidedly rough. The senior member of our firm who formerly had charge of this branch of our business has been seriously ill for several months, and it was only after we had communicated with him at home in bed that we were able to extract from him anything at all concerning your esteemed order.

He informs us that he turned the order over to Messrs. Burns & Bruce, native fern

collectors of Dunkirk, Tenn., who wrote that they would gather the ferns and forward them to the designated address. He likewise informs us that inasmuch as the firm of Burns & Bruce, as we know only too well, has long been indebted to this firm for a considerable amount, he calculated that they would willingly ship the ferns in partial liquidation of our old claims.

It seems, as he tells us, that they did actually gather the ferns and get them ready for shipment, but at the last minute changed their mind and called on our firm for payment. There the matter was unexpectedly dropped owing to the sudden illness of the aforesaid member of our house, and we knew nothing at all of what had transpired until your letter led us to obtain from him at his bedside the statements above detailed.

An additional embarrassment to the unusually prosperous course of our business was occasioned by the marriage of a junior member of the firm and his consequent absence for a considerable time, which resulted in an augmentation of the expenses of our establishment and an unfortunate diminution of our profits.

In view of the illness of the senior member of our house and in view of the marriage of a junior member and in view of the losses and expenses consequent thereon, and in view of the subsequent withdrawal of both from active participation in the conduct of the affairs of our firm, and in view also of a disagreement which arose between both members and the other members as to the financial basis of a settlement on which the withdrawal could take place, our affairs have of necessity been thrown into court in litigation and are still in litigation up to this date.

Regretting that you should have been seemingly inconvenienced in the slightest degree by the apparent neglect of a former member of our firm, we desire to add that as soon as matters can be taken out of court our firm will be reorganised and that we shall continue to give, as heretofore, the most scrupulous attention to all orders received.

But we repeat that your letter is pretty rough.

Very truly yours,

PHILLIPS & FAULDS.

BURNS & BRUCE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Dunkirk, Tenn.,
May 20, 1911.

DEAR SIR:

Your letter to hand. Phillips & Faulds gave us the order for the ferns. Owing to extreme drought last Fall the ferns withered earlier than usual and it was unsafe to ship at that time; in the Winter the weather was so severe that even in February we were unable to make any digging, as the frost had not disappeared. When at last we got the ferns ready, we called on them for payment and they wouldn't pay. Phillips & Faulds are not good paying bills and we could not put ourselves to expense filling their new order for ferns, not wishing to take more risk. old, old accounts against them unpaid, and could not afford to ship more. proved very unsatisfactory and had to drop them entirely.

Are already out of pocket the cost of the ferns, worthless to us when Phillips & Faulds dodged and wouldn't pay, pretending we owed them because they won't pay their bills.

If you do not wish to have any further dealings with them you might write to Noah Chamberlain at Seminole, North Carolina, just over the state line, not far from here, an authority on American ferns. We have sometimes collected rare ferns for him to ship to England and other European countries. Vouch for him as an honest man. Always paid his bills. old accounts against Phillips & Faulds unpaid; dropped them entirely.

Very truly yours,
BURNS & BRUCE.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

May 24.

DEAR BEN:

You requested me to send you for possible future reference all incoming letters upon the subject of the ferns. Here are two more that have just fluttered down from the blue heaven of the unexpected or been thrust up from the lower regions through a crack in the earth's surface.

Spare a few minutes to admire the rippling

eloquence of Messrs. Phillips & Faulds. When the eloquence has ceased to ripple and settles down to stay, their letter has the cold purity of a whitewashed rotten Kentucky fence. They and another firm of florists have a lawsuit as to which owes the other, and they meantime compel me, an innocent bystander, to deliver to them my pocketbook.

Will you please immediately bring suit against Phillips & Faulds on behalf of my valuable twenty-five dollars and invaluable indignation? Bring suit against and bring your boot against them if you can. My ducats! Have my ducats out of them or their peace by day and night.

The other letter seems of an unhewn probity that wins my confidence. That is to say, Burns & Bruce, whoever they are, assure me that I ought to believe, and with all my heart I do now believe, in the existence, just over the Tennessee state line, of a florist of good character and a business head. Thus I now press on over the Tennessee state line into North Carolina.

For the ferns must be sent to Mr. Blackthorne; more than ever they must go to him now. Not the entire British army drawn up

on the white cliffs of Dover could keep me from landing them on the British Isle. Even if I had to cross over to England, travel to his home, put the ferns down before him or throw them at his head and walk out of his house without a word.

I told you I had a borrowed premonition that there would be trouble ahead: now it is not a premonition, it is my belief and terror. I have grown to stand in dread of all florists, and I approach this third one with my hat in my hand (also with my other hand on my pocketbook).

BEVERLEY.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO NOAH CHAMBERLAIN

Cathedral Heights, New York,
May 25, 1911.

DEAR SIR:

You have been recommended to me by Messrs. Burns & Bruce, of Dunkirk, Tennessee, as a nurseryman who can be relied upon to keep his word and to carry out his business obligations.

Accepting at its face value their high testimonial as to your trustworthiness, I desire to place with you the following order:

Messrs. Burns & Bruce, acting upon my request, have forwarded to you a list of rare Kentucky ferns. I desire you to collect these ferns and to ship them to Mr. Edward Blackthorne, Esq., King Alfred's Wood, Warwickshire, England. As a guaranty of good faith on my part, I enclose in payment my check for twenty-five dollars. Will you have the kindness to let me know at once whether you will undertake this commission and give it the strictest attention?

Very truly yours,

BEVERLEY SANDS.

NOAH CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
May 29.

SIR:

I have received your letter with your check in it.

You are the first person that ever offered me money as a florist. I am not a florist, if I must take time to inform you. I had sup-

posed it to be generally known throughout the United States and in Europe that I am professor of botany in this college, and have been for the past fifteen years. If Burns & Bruce really told you I am a florist—and I doubt it—they must be greater ignoramuses than I took them to be. I always knew that they did not have much sense, but I thought they had a little. It is true that they have at different times gathered specimens of ferns for me, and more than once have shipped them to Europe. But I never imagined they were fools enough to think this made me a florist. My collection of ferns embraces dried specimens for study in my classrooms and specimens growing on the college grounds. The ferns I have shipped to Europe have been sent to friends and correspondents. The President of the Royal Botanical Society of Great Britain is an old friend of mine. I have sent him some and I have also sent some to friends in Norway and Sweden and to other scientific students of botany.

It only shows that your next-door neighbour may know nothing about you, especially if you are a little over your neighbour's head.

My daughter, who is my secretary, will

return your check, but I thought I had better write and tell you myself that I am not a florist.

Yours truly,
NOAH CHAMBERLAIN, A.M., B.S., Litt.D.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
May 29.

SIR:

I can but express my intense indignation, as Professor Chamberlain's only daughter, that you should send a sum of money to my distinguished father to hire his services as a nurseryman. I had supposed that my father was known to the entire intelligent American public as an eminent scientist, to be ranked with such men as Dana and Gray and Alexander von Humboldt.

People of our means and social position in the South do not peddle bulbs. We do not reside at the entrance to a cemetery and earn our bread by making funeral wreaths and crosses.

You must be some kind of nonentity.
Your cheque is pinned to this letter.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO NOAH CHAMBERLAIN

June 3.

DEAR SIR:

I am deeply mortified at having believed Messrs. Burns & Bruce to be well-informed and truthful Southern gentlemen. I find that it is no longer safe for me to believe anybody —not about nurserymen. I am not sure now that I should believe you. You say you are a famous botanist, but you may be merely a famous liar, known as such to various learned bodies in Europe. Proof to the contrary is necessary, and you must admit that your letter does not furnish me with that proof.

Still I am going to believe you and I renew the assurance of my mortification that I have innocently caused you the chagrin of discovering that you are not so well known, at least in this country, as you supposed. I suffer from the same chagrin: many of us do; it is the tie that binds: blest be the tie.

I shall be extremely obliged if you will have the kindness to return to me the list of ferns forwarded to you by Messrs. Burns & Bruce, and for that purpose you will please to find enclosed an envelope addressed and stamped.

I acknowledge the return of my cheque, which occasions me some surprise and not a little pleasure.

Allow me once more to regret that through my incurable habit of believing strangers, believing everybody, I was misled into taking the lower view of you as a florist instead of the higher view as a botanist. But you must admit that I was right in classification and wrong only in elevation.

Very truly yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS, A.B. (merely).

NOAH CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

June 8.

SIR:

I know nothing about any list of ferns. Stop writing to me.

NOAH CHAMBERLAIN.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

June 8.

SIR:

It is excruciating the way you continue to persecute my great father. What is wrong with you? What started you to begin on us in this way? We never heard of *you*. Would you let my dear father alone?

He is a very deep student and it is intolerable for me to see his priceless attention drawn from his work at critical moments when he might be on the point of making profound discoveries. My father is a very absent-minded man, as great scholars usually are, and when he is interrupted he may even forget what he has just been thinking about.

Your letter was a very serious shock to him, and after reading it he could not even drink his tea at supper or enjoy his cold ham. Time and again he put his cup down and said to me in a trembling voice: "Think of his calling me a famous liar!" Then he got up from the table without eating anything and left the room. He turned at the door and said to me, with a confused expression: "I

may, once in my life—but *he* didn't know anything about *that*."

He shut his door and stayed in his library all evening, thinking without nourishment.

What a viper you are to call my great father a liar.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

June 12.

DEAR BEN:

I knew I was in for it! I send another installment of incredible letters from unbelievable people.

In my wanderings over the earth after the ferns I have innocently brought my foot against an ant-hill of Chamberlains. I called the head of the hill a florist and he is a botanist, and the whole hill is frantic with fury. As far as heard from, there are only two ants in the hill, but the two make a lively many in their letters. It's a Southern vendetta and my end may draw nigh.

Now, too, the inevitable quarrel with Tilly is at hand. She has been out of town for a house-party somewhere and is to return to-

morrow. When Tilly came to New York a few years ago she had not an acquaintance; now I marvel at the world of people she knows. It is the result of her never declining an invitation. Once I derided her about this, and with her almost terrifying honesty she avowed the reason: that no one ever knew what an acquaintanceship might lead to. This principle, or lack of principle, has led her far. And wherever she goes, she is welcomed afterwards. It is her mystery, her charm. I often ask myself what *is* her charm. At least her charm, as all charm, is victory. You are defeated by her, chained and dragged along. Of course, I expect all this to be reversed after Tilly marries me. Then I am to have my turn—she is to be led around, dragged helpless by *my* charm. Magnificent outlook!

To-morrow she is to return, and I shall have to tell her that it is all over—our wonderful summer in England. It is gone, the whole vision drifts away like a gorgeous cloud, carrying with it the bright raindrops of her hopes.

I have never, by the way, mentioned to Tilly this matter of the ferns. My first idea was to surprise her: as some day we strolled

through the Blackthorne garden he would point to the Kentucky specimens flourishing there in honour of me. I have always observed that any unexpected pleasure flushes her face with a new light, with an effulgence of fresh beauty, just as every disappointment makes her suddenly look old and rather ugly.

This was the first reason. Now I do not intend to tell her at all. Disappointment will bring out her demand to know why she is disappointed—naturally. But how am I to tell on the threshold of marriage that it is all due to a misunderstanding about a handful of ferns! It would be ridiculous. She would never believe me—naturally. She would infer that I was keeping back the real reason, as being too serious to be told.

Here, then, I am. But where am I?

BEVERLEY (complete and final disappearance of the Magic Skin).

BEN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

June 13.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

You are perfectly right not to tell Tilly about the ferns. Here I come in: there must

always be things that a man must refuse to tell a woman. As soon as he tells her everything, she puts her foot on his neck. I have always refused even to tell Polly some things, not that they might not be told, but that Polly must not be told them; not for the things' sake, but for Polly's good—and for a man's peaceful control of his own life.

For whatever else a woman marries in a man, one thing in him she must marry: a rock. Times will come when she will storm and rage around that rock; but the storms cannot last forever, and when they are over, the rock will be there. By degrees there will be less storm. Polly's very loyalty to me inspires her to take possession of my whole life; to enter into all my affairs. I am to her a house, no closet of which must remain locked. Thus there are certain closets which she repeatedly tries to open. I can tell by her very expression when she is going to try once more. Were they opened, she would not find much; but it is much to be guarded that she shall not open them.

The matter is too trivial to explain to Tilly as fact and too important as principle.

Harbour no fear that Polly knows from me

anything about the ferns! When I am with Polly, my thoughts are not on the grass of the fields.

Let me hear at once how the trouble turns out with Tilly.

I must not close without making a profound obeisance to your new acquaintances—the Chamberlains.

BEN.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO POLLY BOLES

June 15.

DEAR POLLY:

Something extremely disagreeable has come up between Beverley and me. He tells me we're not to go to England on our wedding journey as anyone's guests: we travel as ordinary American tourists unknown to all England.

You can well understand what this means to me: you have watched all along how I have pinched on my small income to get ready for this beautiful summer. There has been a quarrel of some kind between Mr. Blackthorne and Beverley. Beverley refuses to tell me the nature of the quarrel. I insisted that it was my right to know and he insisted that it

is a man's affair with another man and not any woman's business. Think of a woman marrying a man who lays it down as a law that his affairs are none of her business!

I gave Beverley to understand that our marriage was deferred for the summer. He broke off the engagement.

I had not meant to tell you anything, since I am coming to-night. I have merely wished you to understand how truly anxious I am to see you, even forgetting your last letter—no, not forgetting it, but overlooking it. Remember you *then* broke an appointment with me; *this* time keep your appointment—being loyal! The messenger will wait for your reply, stating whether the way is clear for me to come.

TILLY.

POLLY BOLES TO TILLY SNOWDEN

June 15.

DEAR TILLY:

Dr. Mullen had an appointment with me for to-night, but I have written to excuse myself, and I shall be waiting most impatiently. The coast will be clear and I hope the night will be.

"The turnip," as you call it, will be empty; "the horse-radish" and "the beets" will be still the same; "the wilted sunflower" will shed its usual ray on our heads. No breeze will disturb us, for there will be no fresh air. We shall have the long evening to ourselves, and you can tell me just how it is that you two, *not* heavy Tilly, *not* heavy Beverley, sat on opposite sides of the room and declared to each other:

"I will not."

"I will not."

Since I have broken an engagement for you, be sure not to let any later temptation elsewhere keep you away.

POLLY.

[Later in the day]

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

June 15.

DEAR POLLY:

Beverley and Tilly have had the long-expected final flare-up. Yesterday he wrote, asking me to come up as soon as I was through with business. I spent last night with him.

We drew our chairs up to his opened win-

dow, turned out the lights, got our cigars, and with our feet on the window-sills and our eyes on the stars across the sky talked the long, quiet hours through.

He talked, not I. Little could I have said to him about the woman who has played fast and loose with him while using him for her convenience. He made it known at the outset that not a word was to be spoken against her.

He just lay back in his big easy chair, with his feet on his window-sill and his eyes on the stars, and built up his defence of Tilly. All night he worked to repair wreckage.

As the grey of morning crept over the city his work was well done: Tilly was restored to more than she had ever been. Silence fell upon him as he sat there with his eyes on the reddening east; and it may be that he saw her—now about to leave him at last—as some white, angelic shape growing fainter and fainter as it vanished in the flush of a new day.

You know what I think of this Tilly-angel. If there were any wings anywhere around, it was those of an aeroplane leaving its hangar with an early start to bring down some other

victim: the angel-aeroplane out after more prey. I think we both know who the prey will be.

The solemn influence of the night has rested on me. Were it possible, I should feel even a higher respect for Beverley; there is something in him that fills me with awe. He suffers. He could mend Tilly but he cannot mend himself: in a way she has wrecked him.

Their quarrel brings me with an aching heart closer to you. I must come to-night. The messenger will wait for a word that I may. And a sudden strange chill of desolation as to life's brittle ties frightens me into sending you some roses.

Your lover through many close and constant years,

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

[Still later in the day]

POLLY BOLES TO TILLY SNOWDEN

June 15.

DEAR, DEAR, DEAR TILLY:

An incredible thing has happened. Ben has just written that he wishes to see me to-night. Will you, after all, wait until to-

morrow evening? My dear, I *have* to ask this of you because there is something very particular that Ben desires to talk to me about.

To-morrow night, then, without fail, you and I!

POLLY BOLES.

POLLY BOLES AND BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

[Late at night of the same day]

June 15.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

We have talked the matter over and send you our conjoined congratulations that your engagement is broken off and your immediate peril ended. But our immediate caution is that the end of the betrothal will not necessarily mean the end of entanglement: the tempter will at once turn away from you in pursuit of another man. She will begin to weave her web about *him*. But if possible she will still hold *you* to that web by a single thread. Now, more than ever, you will need to be on your guard, if such a thing is possible to such a nature as yours.

Not until obliged will she ever let you go completely. She hath a devil—perhaps the most famous devil in all the world—the love devil. And all devils, famous or not famous, are poor quitters.

(Signed)
POLLY BOLES for Ben Doolittle.
BEN DOOLITTLE for Polly Boles.
(His handwriting; her ideas and language.)

TILLY SNOWDEN TO DR. MARIGOLD

MY DEAR DR. MARIGOLD:

This is the third time within the past several months that I have requested you to let me have your bill for professional services. I shall not suppose that you have relied upon my willingness to remain under an obligation of this kind; nor do I like to think I have counted for so little among your many patients that you have not cared whether I paid you or not. If your motive has been kindness, I must plainly tell you that I do not desire such kindness; and if there has been no motive at all, but simply indifference,

I must remind you that this indifference means disrespect and that I resent it.

The things you have indirectly done for me in other ways—the songs, the books and magazines, the flowers—these I accept with warm responsive hands and a lavish mind.

And with words not yet uttered, perhaps never to be uttered.

Yours sincerely,

TILLY SNOWDEN.

June the Seventeenth.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO DR. MARIGOLD

MY DEAR DR. MARIGOLD:

I have your bill and I make the due remittance with all due thanks.

Your note pleasantly reassures me how greatly you are obliged that I could put you in correspondence with some Kentucky cousins about the purchase of a Kentucky saddle-horse. It was a pleasure; in fact, a matter of some pride to do this, and I am delighted that they could furnish you a horse you approve.

While taking my customary walk in the Park yesterday morning, I had a chance to see you and your new mount making acquaint-

ance with one another. I can pay you no higher compliment than to say that you ride like a Kentuckian.

Unconsciously, I suppose, it has become a habit of mine to choose the footways through the Park which skirt the bridle path, drawn to them by my childhood habit and girlish love of riding. Even to see from day to day what one once had but no longer has is to keep alive hope that one may some day have it again.

You should some time go to Kentucky and ride there. My cousins will look to that.

Yours sincerely,

TILLY SNOWDEN.

June the Eighteenth.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO DR. MARIGOLD

MY DEAR DR. MARIGOLD:

I was passing this morning and witnessed the accident, and I must express my condolences for what might have been and congratulations upon what was.

You certainly fell well—not unlike a Kentuckian!

I feel sure that my cousins could not have known the horse was tricky. Any horse is tricky to the end of his days and the end of his road. He may not show any tricks at home, but becomes tricky in new places. (Can this be the reason that he is called the most human of beasts?)

You buying a Kentucky horse brings freshly to my mind that of late you have expressed growing interest in Kentucky. More than once, also (since you have begun to visit me), you have asked me to tell you about my life there. Frankly, this is because I am something of a mystery and you would like to have the mystery cleared up. You wish to find out, without letting me know you are finding out, whether there is not something *wrong* about me, some *risk* for you in visiting me. That is because you have never known anybody like me. I frighten you because I am not afraid of people, not afraid of life. You are used to people who are afraid, especially to women who are afraid. You yourself are horribly afraid of nearly everything.

Suppose I do tell you a little about my life, though it may not greatly explain why I am

without fear; still, the land and the people might mean something; they ought to mean much.

I was born of not very poor and immensely respectable parents in a poor and not very respectable county of Kentucky. The first thing I remember about life, my first social consciousness, was the discovery that I was entangled in a series of sisters: there were six of us. I was as nearly as possible at the middle of the procession—with three older and two younger, so that I was crowded both by what was before and by what was behind. I early learned to fight for the present—against both the past and the future—learned to seize what I could, lest it be seized either by hands reaching backward or by hands reaching forward. Literally, I opened my eyes upon life's insatiate competition and I began to practise at home the game of the world.

Why my mother bore only daughters will have to be referred to the new science which takes as its field the forces and the mysteries that are sovereign between the nuptials and the cradle. But the reason, as openly laughed about in the family when the family grew old

enough to laugh, as laughed about in the neighbourhood, was this:

Even before marriage my father and my mother had waged a violent discussion about woman's suffrage. You may not know that in Kentucky from the first the cause of female suffrage has been upheld by a strong minority of strong women, a true pioneer movement toward the nation's future now near. It seems that my father, who was a brilliant lawyer, always browbeat my mother in argument, overwhelmed her, crushed her. Unconvinced, in resentful silence, she quietly rocked on her side of the fireplace and looked deep into the coals. But regularly when the time came she replied to all his arguments by presenting him with another suffragette! Throughout her life she declined even to bear him a son to continue the argument! Her six daughters—she would gladly have had twelve if she could—were her triumphant squad for the armies of the great rebellion.

Does this help to explain me to you?

What next I relate about my early life is something that you perhaps have never given a thought to—children's pets and playthings: it explains a great deal. Have you ever

thought of a vital difference between country children and town children? Country children more quickly throw away their dolls, if they have them, and attach their sympathies to living objects. A child's love of a doll is at best a sham: a little master-drama of the child's imagination trying to fill two rôles—its own and the rôle of something which cannot respond. But a child's love of a living creature, which it chooses as the object of its love and play and protection, is stimulating, healthful and kicking with reality: because it is vitalised by reciprocity in the playmate, now affectionate and now hostile, but always representing something intensely alive—which is the whole main thing.

We are just beginning to find out that the dramas of childhood are the playgrounds of life's battlefields. The ones prepare for the others. A nature that will cling to a rag doll without any return, will cling to a rag husband without any return. A child's loyalty to an automaton prepares a woman for endurance of an automaton. Dolls have been the undoing and the death of many wives.

A multitude of dolls would have been needed to supply the six destructive little girls of my

mother's household. We soon broke our china tea sets or, more gladly, smashed one another's. For whatever reason, all lifeless pets, all shams, were quickly swept out of the house and the little scattering herd of us turned our restless and insatiate natures loose upon life itself. Sooner or later we petted nearly everything on the farm. My father was a director of the County Fair, and I remember that one autumn, about fair-time, we roped off a corner of the yard and held a prize exhibition of our favourites that year. They comprised a kitten, a duck, a pullet, a calf, a lamb and a puppy.

Sooner or later our living playthings outgrew us or died or were sold or made their sacrificial way to the kitchen. Were we disconsolate? Not a bit. Did we go down to the branch and gather there under an old weeping willow? Quite the contrary. Our hearts thrived on death and destruction, annihilation released us from old ties, change gave us another chance, and we provided substitutes and continued our devotion.

And I think this explains a good deal. And these two experiences of my childhood, taken together, explain me better than any-

thing else I know. Competition first taught me to seize what I wanted before anyone else could seize it. Natural changes next taught me to be prepared at any moment to give that up without vain regret and to seize something else. Thus I seemed to learn life's lesson as I learned to walk: that what you love will not last long, and that long love is possible only when you love often.

So many women know this; how few admit it!

Sincerely yours,

TILLY SNOWDEN.

June the Nineteenth.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO DR. MARIGOLD

MY DEAR DR. MARIGOLD:

You sail to-morrow. And to-morrow I go away for the summer: first to some friends, then further away to other friends, then still further away to other friends: a summer pageant of brilliant changes.

There is no reason why I should write to you. Your stateroom will be filled with flowers; you will have letters and telegrams;

friends will wave to you from the pier. My letter may be lost among the others, but at least it will have been written, and writing it is its pleasure to me.

I was to go to England this summer, was to go as a bride. A few nights since I decided not to go because I did not approve of the bridegroom.

We marvel at life's coincidences: one evening, not long ago, while speaking of your expected summer in England, you mentioned that you planned to make a pilgrimage to see Edward Blackthorne. You were to join some American friends over there and take them with you. That is the coincidence: *I* was to visit the Blackthornes this very summer, not as a stranger pilgrim, but as an invited guest—with the groom whom I have rejected.

It is like scattering words before the obvious to say that I wish you a pleasant summer. Not a forgetful one. To aid memory, as you, some night on the passage across, lean far over and look down at the phosphorescent couch of the sea for its recumbent Venus of the deep, remember that the Venus of modern life is the American woman.

Am I to see you when autumn, if nothing

else, brings you home—see you not at all or seldom or often?

At least this will remind you that I merely say *au revoir*.

Adrift for the summer rather than be an unwilling bride.

TILLY SNOWDEN.

June twenty-first.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

June 21.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

Since life separated us the other night I have not heard from you. I have not expected a letter, nor do you expect one from me. But I am going away to-morrow for the summer and my heart has a few words for you which must be spoken.

It was not disappointment about the summer in England, not even your refusal to explain why you disappointed me, that held the main reason of my drawing back. I am in the mood to-night to tell you some things very frankly:

Twice before I knew you, I was engaged to be married and twice as the wedding drew

near I drew away from it. It is an old, old feeling of mine, though I am so young, that if married I should not long be happy. Of course I should be happy for a while. But *afterwards!* The interminable, intolerable *afterwards!* The same person year in and year out—I should be stifled. Each of the men to whom I was engaged had given me before marriage all that he had to give: the rest I did not care for; after marriage with either I foresaw only staleness, his limitations, monotony.

Believe this, then: there are things in you that I cling to, other things in you that do not draw me at all. And I cling more to life than to you, more than to any one person. How can any one person ever be all to me, all that I am meant for, and *I will live!*

Why should we women be forced to spend our lives beside the first spring where one happened to fill one's cup at life's dawn! Why be doomed to die in old age at the same spring! With all my soul I believe that the world which has slowly thrown off so many tyrannies is about to throw off other tyrannies. It has been so harsh toward happiness, so compassionate toward misery and wrong.

Yet happiness is life's finest victory: for ages we have been trying to defeat our one best victory—our natural happiness!

A brief cup of joy filled at life's morning—then to go thirsty for the rest of the long, hot, weary day! Why not goblet after goblet at spring after spring—there are so many springs! And thirst is so eager for them!

Come to see me in the autumn. For I will not, cannot, give you up. And when you come, do not seek to renew the engagement. Let that go whither it has gone. But come to see me.

For I love you.

TILLY.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO POLLY BOLES

June 21.

POLLY BOLES:

This is good-bye to you for the summer and, better than that, it is good-bye to you for life. Why not, in parting, face the truth that we have long hated each other and have used our acquaintanceship and our letters to express our hatred? How could there ever have been any friendship between you and me?

Let me tell you of the detestable little signs that I have noticed in you for years. Are you aware that all the time you have occupied your apartment, you have never changed the arrangement of your furniture? As soon as your guests are gone, you push every chair where it was before. For years your one seat has been the same end of the same frayed sofa. Many a time I have noted your disquietude if any guest happened to sit there and forced you to sit elsewhere. For years you have worn the same breast-pin, though you have several. The idea of your being inconstant to a breast-pin! You pride yourself in such externals of faithfulness.

You soul of perfidy!

I leave you undisturbed to innumerable appointments with Ben, and with the same particular something to talk about, falsest woman I have ever known.

Have you confided to Ben Doolittle the fact that you are secretly receiving almost constant attentions from Dr. Mullen? Will you tell him? *Or shall I?*

TILLY SNOWDEN.

POLLY BOLES TO BEN DOOLITTLE

DEAR BEN: *June 23rd.*

I am worried.

I begin to feel doubtful as to what course I should pursue with Dr. Claude Mullen. Of late he has been coming too often. He has been writing to me too often. He appears to be losing control of himself. Things cannot go on as they are and they must not get worse. What I could not foresee is his determination to hold *me* responsible for his being in love with me! He insists that *I* encouraged him and am now unfair—*me* unfair! Of course I have *never* encouraged his visits; out of simple goodness of heart I have *tolerated* them. Now the reward of my *kindness* is that he holds me responsible and guilty. He is trying, in other words, to take advantage of my *sympathy* for him. I *do* feel sorry for him!

I have not been cruel enough to dismiss him. His last letter is enclosed: it will give you some idea——!

Can you advise me what to do? I have always relied upon *your* judgment in everything.

Faithfully yours,

POLLY.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

[Penciled in Court Room]

June 24th.

DEAR POLLY:

Certainly I can advise you. My advice is: tell him to take a cab and drive straight to the nearest institution for the weak-minded, engage a room, lock himself in and pray God to give him some sense. Tell him to stay secluded there until that prayer is answered. The Almighty himself couldn't answer his prayer until after his death, and by that time he'd be out of the way anyhow and you wouldn't mind.

I return his funeral oration unread, since I did not wish to attract attention to myself as moved to tears in open court.

BEN.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

[Evening of the same day]

POLLY, DEAREST, MOST FAITHFUL OF WOMEN:

This is a night I have long waited for and worked for.

You have understood why during these

years I have never asked you to set a day for our marriage. It has been a long, hard struggle, for me coming here poor, to make a living and a practice and a name. You know I have had as my goal not a living for one but a living for two—and for more than two—for our little ones. When I married you, I meant to rescue you from the Franklin Flats, all flats.

But with these two hands of mine I have laid hold of the affairs of this world and shaken them until they have heeded me and my strength. I have won, I am independent, I am my own man and my own master, and I am ready to be your husband as through it all I have been your lover.

Name the day when I can be both.

Yet the day must be distant: I am to leave this firm and establish my own and I want that done first. Some months must yet pass. Any day of next Spring, then—so far away but nearer than any other Spring during these impatient years.

Polly, constant one, I am your constant lover,

BEN DOOLITTLE.

Roses to you.

POLLY BOLES TO BEN DOOLITTLE

June 24.

Oh, BEN, BEN, BEN!

My heart answers you. It leaps forward to the day. I have set the day in my heart and sealed it on my lips. Come and break that seal. To-night I shall tear two of the rosebuds apart and mingle their petals on my pillow.

POLLY.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

June 26.

It occurs to me that our engagement might furnish you the means of getting rid of your prostrated nerve specialist. Write him to come to see you: tell him you have some joyful news that must be imparted at once. When he arrives announce to him that you have named the day of your marriage to me. To *me*, tell him! Then let him take himself off. You say he complains that all this is getting on his nerves. Anything that could sit on his nerves would be a mighty small animal.

BEN.

POLLY BOLES TO BEN DOOLITTLE

June 27.

Our engagement has only made him more determined. He persists in visiting me. His loyalty *is* touching. Suppose the next time he comes I arrange for *you* to come. Your meeting him here might have the desired effect.

POLLY BOLES.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

June 28.

It would certainly have the desired effect, but perhaps not exactly the effect *he* desires. Madam, would you wish to see the nerve filaments of your fond specialist scattered over your carpet as his life's deplorable *arcana?* No, Polly, not that!

Make this suggestion to him: that in order to give him a chance to be near you—but not too near—you do offer him for the first year after our marriage—only one year, mind you—you do offer him, with my consent and at a

good salary, the position of our furnace-man, since he so loves to warm himself with our fires. It would enable him to keep up his habit of getting down on his knees and puffing for you.

BEN.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

DEAR POLLY: *July 14.*

It occurs to me just at the moment that not for some days have I heard you speak of your racked—or wrecked—nerve specialist. Has he learned to control his microscopic attachment? Has he found an antidote for the bacillus of his anæmic love?

Polly, my woman, if he is still bothering you, let me know at once. It has been my joy hitherto to share your troubles; henceforth it is my privilege to take them on two uncrushable shoulders.

At the drop of your hat I'll even meet him in your flat any night you say, and we'll all compete for the consequences.

I. s. y. s. r. r. (You have long since learned what that means.)

Your man,

BEN D.

POLLY BOLES TO BEN DOOLITTLE

July 15.

DEAREST BEN:

You need not give another thought to Dr. Mullen. He does not annoy me any more. He can drop finally out of our correspondence.

Not an hour these days but my thoughts hover about you. Never so vividly as now does there rise before me the whole picture of our past—of all these years together. And I am ever thinking of the day to which we both look forward as the one on which our paths promise to blend and our lives are pledged to meet.

Your devoted

POLLY.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO JUDD & JUDD

July 16.

DEAR SIRS:

Yesterday while walking along the street I found my attention most favourably drawn

to the appearance of your business establishment: to the tubs of plants at the entrance, the vines and flowers in the windows, and the classic Italian statuary properly mildewed. Therefore I venture to write.

Do you know anything about ferns, especially Kentucky ferns? Do you ever collect them and ship them? I wish to place an order for some Kentucky ferns to be sent to England. I had a list of those I desired, but this has been mislaid, and I should have to rely upon the shipper to make, out of his knowledge, a collection that would represent the best of the Kentucky flora. Could you do this?

One more question, and you will please reply clearly and honestly. I notice that your firm speak of themselves as landscape architects. This leads me to inquire whether you have ever had any connection with Botany. You may not understand the question and you are not required to understand it: I simply request you to answer it.

Very truly yours,

Beverley Sands.

JUDD & JUDD TO BEVERLEY SANDS

July 17.

DEAR SIR:

Your esteemed favour to hand. We gather and ship ferns and other plants, subject to order, to any address, native or foreign, with the least possible delay, and we shall be pleased to execute any commission which you may entrust to us.

With reference to your other inquiry, we ask leave to state that we have never had the slightest connection with any other concern doing business in the city under the firm-name of Botany. We do not even find them in the telephone directory.

Awaiting your courteous order, we are

Very truly yours,

JUDD & JUDD.
Per Q.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO "JUDD & JUDD, PER Q."

July 18.

DEAR SIRS:

I am greatly pleased to hear that you have no connection with any other house doing business under the firm-name of Botany, and I

accordingly feel willing to risk giving you the following order: That you will make a collection of the most highly prized varieties of Kentucky ferns and ship them, expenses prepaid, to this address, namely: Mr. Edward Blackthorne, King Alfred's Wood, Warwickshire, England.

As a guaranty of good faith and as the means to simplify matters without further correspondence, I take pleasure in enclosing my cheque for $25.

You will please advise me when the ferns are ready to be shipped, as I wish to come down and see to it myself that they actually do get off.

Very truly yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
July 18.

DEAR SIR:

I met with the melancholy misfortune a few weeks ago of losing my great father. Since his death I have been slowly going over his papers. He left a large mass of them in

disorder, for his was too active a mind to pause long enough to put things in order.

In a bundle of notes I have come across a letter to him from Burns & Bruce with the list of ferns in it that they sent him and that had been misplaced. My dear father was a very absent-minded scholar, as is natural. He had penciled a query regarding one of the ferns on the list, and I suppose, while looking up the doubtful point, he had laid the list down to pursue some other idea that suddenly attracted him and then forgot what he had been doing. My father worked over many ideas and moved with perfect ease from one to another, being equally at home with everything great—a mental giant.

I send the list back to you that it may remind you what a trouble and affliction you have been. Do not acknowledge the receipt of it, for I do not wish to hear from you.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO JUDD & JUDD

July 21.

DEAR SIRS:

I wish to take up immediately my commission placed a few days ago. I referred in

my first letter to a mislaid list of ferns. This has just turned up and is herewith enclosed, and I now wish you to make a collection of the ferns called for on this list.

Please advise me at once whether you will do this.

Very truly yours,

BEVERLEY SANDS.

JUDD & JUDD TO BEVERLEY SANDS

July 22.

DEAR SIR:

Your letter to hand, with the list of ferns enclosed. We shall be pleased to cancel the original order, part of which we advise you had already been filled. It does not comprise the plants called for on the list.

This will involve some slight additional expense, and if agreeable, we shall be pleased to have you enclose your cheque for the slight extra amount as per enclosed bill.

Very truly yours,

JUDD & JUDD.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO JUDD & JUDD

July 23.

DEAR SIRS:

I have your letter and I take the greatest possible pleasure in enclosing my cheque to cover the additional expense, as you kindly suggest.

Very truly yours,
BEVERLEY SANDS.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

October 30.

DEAR BEN:

They are gone! They're off! They have weighed anchor! They have sailed; they have departed!

I went down and watched the steamer out of sight. Packed around me at the end of the pier were people, waving hats and handkerchiefs, some laughing, some with tears on their cheeks, some with farewells quivering on their dumb mouths. But everybody forgot his joy or his trouble to look at me: I outwaved, out-shouted them all. An old New York Harbour gull, which is the last creature

in the world to be surprised at anything, flew up and glanced at me with a jaded eye.

I have felt ever since as if the steamer's anchor had been taken from around my neck. I have become as human cork which no storm, no leaden weight, could ever sink. Come what will to me now from Nature's unkinder powers! Let my next pair of shoes be made of briers, my next waistcoat of rag weed! Fasten every morning around my neck a collar of the scaly-bark hickory! See to it that my undershirts be made of the honey-locust! For olives serve me green persimmons; if I must be poulticed, swab me in poultices of pawpaws! But for the rest of my days may the Maker of the world in His occasional benevolence save me from the things on it that look frail and harmless like ferns.

Come up to dinner! Come, all there is of you! We'll open the friendly door of some friendly place and I'll dine you on everything commensurate with your simplicity. I'll open a magnum or a magnissimum. I'll open a new subway and roll down into it for joy.

They are gone to him, his emblems of fidelity. I don't care what he does with them.

They will for the rest of his days admonish him that in his letter to me he sinned against the highest law of his own gloriously endowed nature:

Le Génie Oblige

Accept this phrase, framed by me for your pilgrim's script of wayside French sayings. Accept it and translate it to mean that he who has genius, no matter what the world may do to him, no matter what ruin Nature may work in him, that he who has genius, is under obligation so long as he lives to do nothing mean and to do nothing meanly.

BEVERLEY.

ANNE RAEBURN TO EDWARD BLACKTHORNE IN ITALY

King Alfred's Wood,
Warwickshire, England,
November 30.

MY DEAR MR. BLACKTHORNE:

I continue my chronicles of an English country-place during the absence of its master, with the hope that the reading of the chronicles may cause him to hasten his return.

An amusing, perhaps a rather grave, matter passed under my observation yesterday. The afternoon was clear and mild and I had taken my work out into the garden. From where I sat I could see Hodge at work with his spade some distance away. Quite unconsciously, I suppose, I lifted my eyes at intervals to look toward him, for by degrees I became aware that Hodge at intervals was looking toward me. I noticed that he was red in the face, which is always a sign of his anger; apparently he wavered as to whether he should or should not do a debatable thing. Finally lifting his spade high and bringing it down with such force that he sent it deep into the mould where it stood upright, he started toward me.

You know how, as he approaches anyone, he loosens his cap from his forehead and scrapes the back of his neck with the back of his thumb. As he stood before me he did this now. Then he made the following announcement in the voice of an aggrieved bully:

"The *Scolopendium vulgare* put up two new shoots after he went away, mum. Bishop's crooks he calls 'em, mum."

I replied that I was glad to hear the ferns

were thrifty. He, jerking his thumb toward the fern bank, added still more resentfully:

"The *Adiantum nigrum* put up some, mum."

I replied that I should announce to you the good news.

Plainly this was not what he had come to tell me, for he stood embarrassed but not budging, his eyes blazing with a kind of stupid fury. At last he brought out his trouble.

It seems that one day last week a hamper of ferns arrived for you from New York, with only the names of the shippers, charges prepaid. I was not at home, having that day gone to the Vicar's with some marmalade; so Hodge took it upon himself to receive the hamper. By his confession he unwrapped the package and discovering the contents to be a collection of fern-roots, with the list of the Latin names attached, he re-wrapped them and re-shipped them to the forwarding agents —charges to be collected in New York.

This is now Hodge's plight: he is uncertain whether the plants were some you had ordered, or were a gift to you from some friend, or merely a gratuitous advertisement by an American nurseryman. Whether yours or another's, of much value to you or none, he

resolved that they should not enter the garden. There was no place for them in the garden without there being a place for their Latin names in his head, and his head would hold no more. At least his temper is the same that has incited all English rebellion: human nature need not stand for it!

The skies are wistful some days with blue that is always brushed over by clouds: England's same still blue beyond her changing vapours. The evenings are cosy with lamps and November fires and with new books that no hand opens. A few late flowers still bloom, loyal to youth in a world that asks of them now only their old age. The birds sit silent with ruffled feathers and look sturdy and established on the bare shrubs: liberals in spring, conservatives in autumn, wise in season. The larger trees strip their summer flippancies from them garment by garment and stand in their noble nakedness, a challenge to the cold.

The dogs began to wait for you the day you left. They wait still, resolved at any cost to show that they can be patient; that is, well-bred. The one of them who has the higher intelligence! The other evening I filled and

lighted your pipe and held it out to him as I have often seen you do. He struck the floor softly with the tip of his tail and smiled with his eyes very tenderly at me, as saying: "You want to see whether I remember that *he* did that; of course I remember." Then, with a sudden suspicion that he was possibly being very stupid, with quick, gruff bark he ran out of the room to make sure. Back he came, his face in broad silent laughter at himself and his eyes announcing to me—"Not yet."

Do not all these things touch you with homesickness amid the desolation of the Grand Canal—with the shallow Venetian songs that patter upon the ear but do not reach down into strong Northern English hearts?

I have already written this morning to Mrs. Blackthorne. As each of you hands my letters to the other, these petty chronicles, sent out divided here in England, become united in a foreign land.

I am, dear Mr. Blackthorne,

Respectfully yours,

Anne Raeburn.

JUDD & JUDD TO BEVERLEY SANDS

December 27.

DEAR SIR:

We have to report that the ferns recently shipped to a designated address in England in accordance with your instructions have been returned with charges for return shipment to be collected at our office. We enclose our bill for these charges and ask your attention to it at your early convenience. The ferns are ruined and worthless to us.

Very truly yours,

JUDD & JUDD.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO JUDD & JUDD

December 30.

DEAR SIRS:

I am very much obliged to you for your letter and I take the greatest pleasure imaginable in enclosing my cheque to cover the charges of the return shipment.

Very truly yours,

BEVERLEY SANDS.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

December 28.

DEAR BEN:

The ferns have come back to me from England!

BEVERLEY.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

December 29.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

I am with you, brother, to the last root. But don't send any more ferns to anybody—don't try to, for God's sake! I'm with you! *J'y suis, J'y reste.* (French forever! *Boutez en avant, mon* French!)

By the way, our advice is that you drop the suit against Phillips & Faulds. They are engaged in a lawsuit and as we look over the distant Louisville battlefield, we can see only the wounded and the dying—and the poor. Would you squeeze a druggist's sponge for live tadpoles? Whatever you got, you wouldn't get tadpoles, not live ones.

Our fee is $50; hadn't you better stop at $50 and think yourself lucky? *Monsieur a bien tombé.*

Any more fern letters? Don't forget *them.*

BEN DOOLITTLE.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

December 30.

DEAR BEN:

I take your advice, of course, about dropping the suit against Phillips & Faulds, and I take pleasure in enclosing you my cheque for $50—damn them. That's $75—damn them. And if anybody else anywhere around hasn't received a cheque from me for nothing, let him or her rise, and him or her will get one.

No more letters yet. But I feel a disturbance in the marrow of my bones and doubtless others are on the way, as one more spell of bad weather—another storm for me.

BEVERLEY.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
December 25.

SIR:

This is Christmas Day, when every one is thinking of peace and good will on earth. It makes me think of you. I cannot forget

you, my feeling is too bitter for oblivion, for it was you who were instrumental in bringing about my father's death. One damp night I heard him get up and then I heard him fall, and rushing to him to see what was the matter, I found that he had stumbled down the three steps which led from his bedroom to his library, and had rolled over on the floor, with his candle burning on the carpet beside him. I lifted him up and asked him what he was doing out of bed and he said he had some kind of recollection about a list of ferns; it worried him and he could not sleep.

The fall was a great shock to his nervous system and to mine, and a few days after that he contracted pneumonia from the cold, being already troubled with lumbago.

My father's life-work, which will never be finished now, was to be called "Approximations to Consciousness in Plants." He believed that bushes knew a great deal of what is going on around them, and that trees sometimes have queer notions which cause them to grow crooked, and that ferns are most intelligent beings. It was while thus engaged, in a weakened condition with this work on "Consciousness in Plants," that he suddenly

lost consciousness himself and did not afterwards regain it as an earthly creature.

I shall always remember you for having been instrumental in his death. This is the kind of Christmas Day you have presented to me.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
January 7.

DEAR SIR:

Necessity knows no law, and I have become a sad victim of necessity, hence this appeal to you.

My wonderful father left me in our proud social position without means. I was thrown by his death upon my own resources, and I have none but my natural faculties and my wonderful experience as his secretary.

With these I had to make my way to a livelihood and deep as was the humiliation of a proud, sensitive daughter of the South and of such a father, I have been forced to come down to a position I never expected to

occupy. I have accepted a menial engagement in a small florist establishment of young Mr. Andy Peters, of this place.

Mr. Andy Peters was one of my father's students of Botany. He sometimes stayed to supper, though, of course, my father did not look upon him as our social equal, and cautioned me against receiving his attentions, not that I needed the caution, for I repeatedly watched them sitting together and they were most uncongenial. My father's acquaintance with him made it easier for me to enter his establishment. I am to be his secretary and aid him with my knowledge of plants and especially to bring the influence of my social position to bear on his business.

Since you were the instrument of my father's death, you should be willing to aid me in my efforts to improve my condition in life. I write to say that it would be as little as you could do to place your future commissions for ferns with Mr. Andy Peters. He has just gone into the florist's business and these would help him and be a recommendation to me for bringing in custom. He might raise my salary, which is so small that it is galling.

While father remained on earth and roved

the campus, he filled my life completely. I have nothing to fill me now but orders for Mr. Andy Peters.

Hoping for an early reply,

A proud daughter of the Southland,

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

January 10.

DEAR BEN:

The tumult in my bones was a well-advised monitor. More fern letters *were* on the way: I enclose them.

You will discover from the earlier of these two documents that during a late unconscious scrimmage in North Carolina I murdered an aged botanist of international reputation. At least one wish of my life is gratified: that if I ever had to kill anybody, it would be some one who was great. You will gather from this letter that, all unaware of what I was doing, I tripped him up, rolled him downstairs, knocked his candle out of his hand and, as he lay on his back all learned and amazed, I attacked him with pneumonia, while lumbago undid him from below.

You will likewise observe that his daughter seems to be an American relative of Hamlet —she has a "harp" in her head: she harps on the father.

One thing I cannot get out of *my* head: have you noticed anything wrong at the Club? Two or three evenings, as we have gone in to dinner, have you noticed anything wrong? Those two charlatans put their heads together last night: their two heads put together do not make one complete head—that may be the trouble; beware of less than one good full-weight head. Something is wrong and I believe they are the dark forces: have you observed anything?

BEVERLEY.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

January 11.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

The letters are filed away with their predecessors.

If I am any judge of human nature, you will receive others from this daughter of the South in the same strain.

If her great father (local meaning, old dad) is really dead, he probably sawed his head off against a tight clothes-line in the back-yard some dark night, while on his way to their gooseberry bushes to see if they had any sense.

More likely he hurled himself headlong into eternity to get rid of her—rolled down the steps with sheer delight and reached for pneumonia with a glad hand to escape his own offspring and her endless society.

The most terrifying thing to me about this new Clara is her Great Desert dryness; no drop of humour ever bedewed her mind. I believe those eminent gentlemen who call themselves biologists have recently discovered that the human system, if deprived of water, will convert part of its dry food into water.

I wish these gentlemen would study the contrariwise case of Clara: she would convert a drink of water into a mouthful of sawdust.

Humour has long been codified by me as one of nature's most solemn gifts. I divide all witnesses into two classes: those who, while giving testimony or being examined or cross-examined, cause laughter in the courtroom at others. The second class turn all laughter

against themselves. That is why the gift of humour is so grave—it keeps us from making ourselves ridiculous. A Frenchman (still my French) has recently pointed out that the reason we laugh is to drive things out of the world, to jolly them out of existence and have a good time as we do it. Therefore not to be laughed at is to survive.

Beware of this new Clara! War breeds two kinds of people: heroes and shams—the heroic and the mock heroic. You and I know the Civil War bred two kinds of burlesque Southerner: the post-bellum Colonel and the spurious proud daughter of the Southland. Proud, sensitive Southern people do not go around proclaiming that they are proud and sensitive. And that word—Southland! Hang the word and shoot the man who made it. There are no proud daughters of the Westland or of the Northland. Beware of this new Clara! This breath of the Desert!

Yes, I have noticed something wrong in the Club. I have hesitated about speaking to you of it. I do not know what it means, but my suspicions lie where yours lie—with those two wallpaper doctors.

BEN.

RUFUS KENT TO BEVERLEY SANDS

The Great Dipper,
January 12.

My dear Mr. Sands:

I have been President of this Club so long —they have refused to have any other president during my lifetime and call me its Nestor —that whenever I am present my visits are apt to consist of interruptions. To-night it is raining and not many members are scattered through the rooms. I shall be at leisure to answer your very grave letter. (I see, however, that I am going to be interrupted.) . . .

My dear Mr. Sands, you are a comparatively new member and much allowance must be made for your lack of experience with the traditions of this Club. You ask: "What is this gossip about? Who started it; what did he start it with?"

My dear Mr. Sands, there *is* no gossip in this Club. It would not be tolerated. We have here only the criticism of life. This Club is The Great Dipper. The origin of the name has now become obscure. It may first have been adopted to mean that the members

would constitute a star-system—a human constellation; it may be otherwise interpreted as the wit of some one of the founders who wished to declare in advance that the Club would be a big, long-handled spoon; with which any member could dip into the ocean of human affairs and ladle out what he required for an evening's conversation.

No gossip here, then. The criticism of life only. What is said in the Club would embrace many volumes. In fact I myself have perhaps discoursed to the vast extent of whole shelves full. Probably had the Club undertaken to bind its conversation, the clubhouse would not hold the books. But not a word of gossip.

I now come to the subject of your letter, and this is what I have ascertained:

During the past summer one of the members of the Club (no name, of course, can be called) was travelling in England. Three or four American tourists joined him at one place or another, and these, finding themselves in one of those enchanted regions of England to which nearly all tourists go and which in our time is made more famous by the novels of Edward Blackthorne—whom I

met in England and many of whose works are read here in the Club by admirers of his genius—this group of American tourists naturally went to call on him at his home. They were very hospitably received; there was a great deal of praise of him and praise everywhere in the world is hospitably received, so I hear. It was a pleasant afternoon; the American visitors had tea with Mr. and Mrs. Blackthorne in their garden. Afterwards Mr. Blackthorne took them for a stroll.

There had been some discussion, as it seems, of English and of American fiction, of the younger men coming on in the two literatures. One of the visitors innocently inquired of Mr. Blackthorne whether he knew of your work. Instantly all noticed a change in his manner: plainly the subject was distasteful, and he put it away from him with some vague rejoinder in a curt undertone. At once some one of the visitors conceived the idea of getting at the reason for Mr. Blackthorne's unaccountable hostility. But his evident resolve was not to be drawn out.

As they strolled through the garden, they paused to admire his collection of ferns, and he impulsively turned to the American who

had been questioning him and pointed to a little spot.

"That," he said, "was once reserved for some ferns which your young American novelist promised to send me."

The whole company gathered curiously about the spot and all naturally asked, "But where are the ferns?"

Mr. Blackthorne without a word and with an air of regret that even so little had escaped him, led the party further away.

That is all. Perhaps that is what you hear in the Club: the hum of the hive that a member should have acted in some disagreeable, unaccountable way toward a very great man whose work so many of us revere. You have merely run into the universal instinct of human nature to think evil of human nature. Emerson had about as good an opinion of it as any man that ever lived, and he called it a scoundrel. It is one of the greatest of mysteries that we are born with a poor opinion of one another and begin to show it as babies. If you do not think that babies despise one another, put a lot of them together for a few hours and see how much good opinion is left.

I feel bound to say that your letter is most

unbridled. There cannot be many things with which the people of Kentucky are more familiar than the bridle, yet they always impress outsiders as the most unbridled of Americans. I *will* add, however, that patrician blood, ancestral blood, is always unbridled. Otherwise I might not now be styled the Nestor of this Club. Only some kind of youthful Hector in this world ever makes one of its aged Nestors. I am interrupted again. . . .

I must conclude my letter rather abruptly. My advice to you is not to pay the slightest attention to all this miserable gossip in the Club. I am too used to that sort of thing here to notice it myself. And will you not at an early date give me the pleasure of your company at dinner?

Faithfully yours,

Rufus Kent.

PART THIRD

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
May 1, 1912.

My dear Sir:

This small greenhouse of Mr. Andy Peters is a stifling, lonesome place. His acquaintances are not the class of people who buy flowers unless there is a death in the family. He has no social position, and receives very few orders in that way. I do what I can for him through my social connections. Time hangs heavily on my hands and I have little to do but think of my lot.

When Mr. Peters and I are not busy, I do not find him companionable. He does not possess the requisite attainments. We have a small library in this town, and I thought I would take up reading. I have always felt so much at home with all literature. I asked the librarian to suggest something new in fiction and she urged me to read a novel by young Mr.

Beverley Sands, the Kentucky novelist. I write now to inquire whether you are the Mr. Beverley Sands who wrote the novel. If you are, I wish to tell you how glad I am that I have long had the pleasure of your acquaintance. Your story comes quite close to me. You understand what it means to be a proud daughter of the Southland who is thrown upon her own resources. Your heroine and I are most alike. There is a wonderful description in your book of a woodland scene with ferns in it.

Would you mind my sending you my own copy of your book, to have you write in it some little inscription such as the following: "For Miss Clara Louise Chamberlain with the compliments of Beverley Sands."

Your story gives me a different feeling from what I have hitherto entertained toward you. You may not have understood my first letters to you. The poor and proud and sensitive are so often misunderstood. You have so truly appreciated me in drawing the heroine of your book that I feel as much attracted to you now as I was repelled from you formerly.

Respectfully yours,

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 10, 1912.

My dear Mr. Sands:

I wish to thank you for putting your name in my copy of your story. Your kindness encourages me to believe that you are all that your readers would naturally think you to be. And I feel that I can reach out to you for sympathy.

The longer I remain in this place, the more out of place I feel. But my main trouble is that I have never been able to meet the whole expense of my father's funeral, though no one knows this but the undertaker, unless he has told it. He is quite capable of doing such a thing. The other day he passed me, sitting on his hearse, and he gave me a look that was meant to remind me of my debt and that was most uncomplimentary.

And yet I was not extravagant. Any ignorant observer of the procession would never have supposed that my father was a thinker of any consequence. The faculty of the college attended, but they did not make

as much of a show as at Commencement. They never do at funerals.

Far be it from me to place myself under obligation to anyone, least of all to a stranger, by receiving aid. I do not ask it. I now wish that I had never spoken to you of your having been instrumental in my father's death.

A proud daughter of the Southland,
CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 17, 1912.

MY DEAR MR. SANDS:

I have received your cheque and I think what you have done is most appropriate.

Since I wrote you last, my position in this establishment has become still more embarrassing. Mr. Andy Peters has begun to offer me his attentions. I have done nothing to bring about this infatuation for me and I regard it as most inopportune.

I should like to leave here and take a position in New York. If I could find a situation there as secretary to some gentleman, my

experience as my great father's secretary would of course qualify me to succeed as his. You may not have cordially responded to my first letters, but you cannot deny that they were well written. If the gentleman were a married man, I could assure the family beforehand that there would be no occasion for jealousy on his wife's part, as so often happens with secretaries, I have heard. If he should have lost his wife and should have little children, I do love little children. While not acting as his secretary, I could be acting with the children.

If my grey-haired father, who is now beyond the blue skies, were only back in North Carolina!

CLARA LOUISE.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 21, 1912.

MY DEAR MR. SANDS:

I have been forced to leave forever the greenhouse of Mr. Andy Peters and am now thrown upon my own resources without a roof over my proud head.

Mr. Andy Peters is a confirmed rascal.

I almost feel that I shall have to do something desperate if I am to succeed.

CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

May 24, 1912.

DEAR BEN:

Clara Louise Chamberlain is in New York! God Almighty!

I have been so taken up lately with other things that I have forgotten to send you a little bundle of letters from her. You will discover from one of these that I gave her a cheque. I know you will say it was folly, perhaps criminal folly; but I *was* in a way "instrumental" in bringing about the great botanist's demise.

If I had described no ferns, there would have been no fern trouble, no fern list. The old gentleman would not have forgotten the list, if I had not had it sent to him; hence he would not have gotten up at midnight to search for it, would not have fallen downstairs, might never have had pneumonia. I can never be acquitted of responsibility!

Besides, she praised my novel (something you have never done!): that alone was worth nearly a hundred dollars to me! Now she is here and she writes, asking me to help her to find employment, as she is without means.

But I can't have that woman as *my* secretary! I dictate my novels. Novels are matters of the emotions. The secretary of a novelist must not interfere with the flow of his emotions. If I were dictating to this woman, she would be like an organ-grinder, and I should be nothing but a little hollow-eyed monkey, wondering what next to do, and too terrified not to do something; my poor brain would be unable even to hesitate about an idea for fear she would think my ideas had given out. Besides she would be the living presence of this whole Pharaoh's plague of Nile Green ferns.

Let her be *your* secretary, will you? In your mere lawyer's work, you do not have any emotions. Give her a job, for God's sake! And remember you have never refused me anything in your life. I enclose her address and please don't send it back to me.

For I am sick, just sick! I am going to undress and get in bed and send for the

doctor and stretch myself out under my bolster and die my innocent death. And God have mercy on all of you! But I already know, when I open my eyes in Eternity, what will be the first thing I'll see. O Lord, I wonder if there is anything but ferns in heaven and hell!

BEVERLEY.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO CLARA LOUISE CHAMBERLAIN

May 25, 1912.

DEAR MADAM:

Mr. Beverley Sands is very much indisposed just at the present time, and has been kind enough to write me with the request that I interest myself in securing for you a position as private secretary. Nothing permanent is before me this morning, but I write to say that I could give you some work to-morrow for the time at least, if you will kindly call at these offices at ten o'clock.

Very truly yours,

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 27, 1912.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

If you keep on getting into trouble, some day you'll get in and never get out. You sent her a cheque! Didn't you know that in doing this you had sent her a blank cheque, which she could afterwards fill in at any cost to your peace? If you are going to distribute cheques to young ladies merely because their fathers die, I shall take steps to have you placed in my legal possession as an adult infant.

Here's what I've done—I wrote to your ward, asking her to present herself at this office at ten o'clock yesterday morning. She was here punctually. I had left instructions that she should be shown at once into my private office.

When she entered, I said good morning, and pointed to a typewriter and to some matter which I asked her to copy. Meantime I finished writing a hypothetical address to a hypothetical jury in a hypothetical case, at the same time making it as little like an actual

address to a jury as possible and as little like law as possible.

Then I asked her to receive the dictation of the address, which was as follows:

"I beg you now to take a good look at this young woman—young, but old enough to know what she is doing. You will not discover in her appearance, gentlemen, any marks of the adventuress. But you are men of too much experience not to know that the adventuress does not reveal her marks. As for my client, he is a perfectly innocent man. Worse than innocent; he is, on account of a certain inborn weakness, a rather helpless human being whenever his sympathies are appealed to, or if anyone looks at him pleasantly, or but speaks a kind word. In a moment of such weakness he yielded to this woman's appeal to his sympathies. At once she converted his generosity into a claim, and now she has begun to press that claim. But that is an old story: the greater your kindness to certain people, the more certain they become that your kindness is simply their due. The better you are, the worse you must have been. Your present virtues are your acknowledgment of former shortcomings. It has be-

come the design of this adventuress—my client having once shown her unmerited kindness—it has now become her apparent design to force upon him the responsibility of her support and her welfare.

"You know how often this is done in New York City, which is not only Babylon for the adventurer and adventuress, but their Garden of Eden, since here they are truly at large with the serpent. You are aware that the adventuress never operates, except in a large city, just as the charlatan of every profession operates in the large city. Little towns have no adventuresses and no charlatans; they are not to be found there because there they would be found out. What I ask is that you protect my client as you would have my client, were he a juryman, help to protect innocent men like you. I ask then that this woman be sentenced to pay a fine of twenty-five dollars and be further sentenced to hard labor in the penitentiary for a term of one year.

"No, I do not ask that. For this young woman is not yet a bad woman. But unless she stops right here in her career, she is likely to become a bad woman. I do ask that you

sentence her to pay a few tears of penitence and to go home, and there be strictly confined to wiser, better thoughts."

When I had dictated this, I asked her to read it over to me; she did so in faltering tones. Then I bade her good morning, said there was no more work for the day, instructed her that when she was through with copying the work already assigned, the head-clerk would receive it and pay for it, and requested her to return at ten o'clock this morning.

This morning she did not come. I called up her address; she had left there. Nothing was known of her.

If you ever write to her again—! And since you, without visible means of support, are so fond of sending cheques to everybody, why not send one to me! Am I to go on defending you for nothing?

Your obedient counsel and turtle,

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

May 28, 1912.

DEAR BEN:

What have you done, what have you done, what have you done! That green child

turned loose in New York, not knowing a soul and not having a cent! Suppose anything happens to her—how shall I feel then!

Of course, you meant well, but my dear fellow, wasn't it a terrible, an inhuman thing to do! Just imagine—but then you *can't* imagine, *can't* imagine, *can't* imagine!

BEVERLEY.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

May 29, 1912.

MY DEAR BEVERLEY:

I am sorry that my bungling efforts in your behalf should have proved such a miscalculation. But as you forgive everybody sooner or later perhaps you will in time pardon even me.

Your respectful erring servant,

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO POLLY BOLES

May 30, 1912.

POLLY BOLES:

The sight of a letter from me will cause a violent disturbance of your routine existence. Our "friendship" worked itself to an open and honourable end about the time I went

away last summer and showed itself to be honest hatred. Since my return in the autumn I have been absorbed in many delightful ways and you, doubtless, have been loyally imbedded in the end of the same frayed sofa, with your furniture arranged as for years past, and with the same breastpin on your constant heart. Whenever we have met, you have let me know that the formidable back of Polly Boles was henceforth to be turned on me.

I write because I will not come to see you. My only motive is that you will forward my letter to Ben Doolittle, whom you have so prejudiced against me, that I cannot even write to him.

My letter concerns Beverley. You do not know that since our engagement was broken last summer he has regularly visited me: we have enjoyed one another in ways that are not fetters. Your friendship for Beverley of course has lasted with the constancy of a wooden pulpit curved behind the head and shoulders of a minister. Ben Doolittle's affection for him is as splendid a thing as one ever sees in life. I write for the sake of us all.

Have you been with Beverley of late? If

so, have you noticed anything peculiar? Has Ben seen him? Has Ben spoken to you of a change? I shall describe as if to you both what occurred to-night during Beverley's visit: he has just gone.

As soon as I entered the parlours I discovered that he was not wholly himself and instantly recollected that he had not for some time seemed perfectly natural. Repeatedly within the last few months it has become increasingly plain that something preyed upon his mind. When I entered the rooms this evening, although he made a quick, clever effort to throw it off, he was in this same mood of peculiar brooding.

Someone—I shall not say who—had sent me some flowers during the day. I took them down with me, as I often do. I think that Beverley, on account of his preoccupation, did not at first notice that I had brought any flowers; he remained unaware, I feel sure, that I placed the vase on the table near which we sat. But a few minutes later he caught sight of them—a handful of roses of the colour of the wild-rose, with some white spray and a few ferns.

When his eyes fell upon the ferns our con-

versation snapped like a thread. Painful silence followed. The look with which one recognises some object that persistently annoys came into his eyes: it was the identical expression I had already remarked when he was gazing as on vacancy. He continued absorbed, disregardful of my presence, until his silence became discourteous. My inquiry for the reason of his strange action was evaded by a slight laugh.

This evasion irritated me still more. You know I never trust or respect people who gloss. His rejoinder was gloss. He was taking it for granted that having exposed to me something he preferred to conceal, he would receive my aid to cover this up: I was to join him in the ceremony of gloss.

As a sign of my displeasure I carried the flowers across the room to the mantelpiece.

But the gaiety and carelessness of the evening were gone. When two people have known each other long and intimately, nothing so quickly separates them as the discovery by one that just beneath the surface of their intercourse the other keeps something hidden. The carelessness of the evening was gone, a sense of restraint followed which each of us

recognised by periods of silence. To escape from this I soon afterward for a moment went up to my room.

I now come to the incident which explains why I think my letter should be sent to Ben Doolittle.

As I re-entered the parlours Beverley was standing before the vase of flowers on the mantelpiece. His back was turned toward me. He did not see me or hear me. I was about to speak when I discovered that he was muttering to himself and making gestures at the ferns. Fragments of expression straggled from him and the names of strange people. I shall not undertake to write down his incoherent mutterings, yet such was the stimulation of my memory due to shock that I recall many of these.

You ought to know by this time that I am by nature fearless; yet something swifter and stranger than fear took possession of me and I slipped from the parlours and ran half-way up the stairs. Then, with a stronger dread of what otherwise might happen, I returned.

Beverley was sitting where I had left him when I quitted the parlours first. He had the air of merely expecting my re-entrance.

I think this is what shocked me most: that he could play two parts with such ready concealment, successful cunning.

Now that he is gone and the whole evening becomes so vivid a memory, I am urged by a feeling of uneasiness to reach Ben Doolittle with this letter, since there is no one else to whom I can turn.

Beverley left abruptly; my manner may have forced that. Certainly for the first time in all these years we separated with a sudden feeling of positive anger. If he calls again, I shall be excused.

Act as you think best. And remember, please, under what stress of feeling I must be to write another letter to you. *To you!*

TILLY SNOWDEN.

TILLY SNOWDEN TO POLLY BOLES

[A second letter enclosed in the preceding one]

My letter of last night was written from impulse. This morning I was so ill that I asked Dr. Marigold to come to see me. I had to explain. He looked grave and finally asked whether he might speak to Dr. Mullen: he thought it advisable; Dr. Mullen could

better counsel what should be done. Later he called me up to inquire whether Dr. Mullen and he could call together.

Dr. Mullen asked me to go over what had occurred the evening before. Dr. Marigold and he went across the room and consulted. Dr. Mullen then asked me who Beverley's physician was. I said I thought Beverley had never been ill in his life. He asked whether Ben Doolittle knew or had better not be told.

Again I leave the matter to Ben and you.

But I have thought it necessary to put down on a separate paper the questions which Dr. Mullen asked with my reply to each. For I do not wish Ben Doolittle to think I said anything about Beverley that I would be unwilling for him or for anyone else to know.

TILLY SNOWDEN.

POLLY BOLES TO TILLY SNOWDEN

June 2, 1912.

TILLY SNOWDEN:

A telegram from Louisville has reached me this morning, announcing the dangerous ill-

ness of my mother, and I go to her by the earliest train. I have merely to say that I have sent your letters to Ben.

I shall add, however, that the formidable back of Polly Boles seems to absorb a good deal of your attention. At least my formidable back is a safe back. It is not an uncontrollable back. It may be spoken of, but at least it is never publicly talked about. It does not lead me into temptation; it is not a scandal. On the whole, I console myself with the knowledge that very few women have gotten into trouble on account of their *backs*. If history speaks truly, quite a few notorious ones have come to grief—but *you* will understand.

POLLY BOLES.

POLLY BOLES TO BEN DOOLITTLE

June 2, 1912.

DEAR BEN:

I find bad news does not come single. I have a telegram from Louisville with the news of my mother's illness and start by the first train. Just after receiving it I had a letter from Tilly, which I enclose.

I, too, have noticed for some time that Beverley has been troubled. Have you seen him of late? Have you noticed anything wrong? What do you think of Tilly's letter? Write me at once. I should go to see him myself but for the news from Louisville. I have always thought Beverley health itself. Would it be possible for him to have a breakdown? I shall be wretched about him until I hear from you. What do you make out of the questions Dr. Mullen asked Tilly and her replies?

Are you going to write to me every day while I am gone?

POLLY.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO PHILLIPS & FAULDS

June 4, 1912.

DEAR SIRS:

I desire to recall myself to you as a former Louisville patron of your flourishing business and also as more recently the New York lawyer who brought unsuccessful suit against you on behalf of one of his clients.

You will find enclosed my cheque, and you are requested to send the value of it in long-

stemmed red roses to Miss Boles—the same address as in former years.

If the stems of your roses do not happen to be long, make them long. (You know the wires.)

Very truly yours,
BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

June 4, 1912.

DEAR POLLY:

You will have had my telegram of sympathy with you in your mother's illness, and of my unspeakable surprise that you could go away without letting me see you.

Have I seen Beverley of late? I have seen him early and late. And I have read Tilly's much mystified and much-mistaken letters. If Beverley is crazy, a Kentucky cornfield is crazy, all roast beef is a lunatic, every Irish potato has a screw loose and the Atlantic Ocean is badly balanced.

I happen to hold the key to Beverley's comic behaviour in Tilly's parlour.

As to the questions put to Tilly by that dilution of all fools, Claude Mullen—your

favourite nerve specialist and former suitor—I have just this to say:

All these mutterings of Beverley—during one of the gambols in Tilly's parlours, which he naturally reserves for me—all these fragmentary expressions relate to real people and to actual things that you and Tilly have never known anything about.

Men must not bother their women by telling them everything. That, by the way, has been an old bone of contention between you and me, Polly, my chosen rib—a silent bone, but still sometimes, I fear, a slightly rheumatic bone. But when will a woman learn that her heavenly charm to a man lies in the thought that he can place her and keep her in a world, into which his troubles cannot come. Thus he escapes from them himself. Let him once tell his troubles to her and she becomes the mirror of them—and possibly the worst kind of mirror.

Beverley has told Tilly nothing of all this entanglement with ferns, I have not told you. All four of us have thereby been the happier.

But through Tilly's misunderstanding those two mischief-making charlatans, Marigold and Mullen, have now come into the case; and it

is of the utmost importance that I deal with these two gentlemen at once; to that end I cut this letter short and start after them.

Oh, but why did you go away without good-bye?

BEN.

BEN DOOLITTLE TO POLLY BOLES

June 5, 1912.

DEAR POLLY:

I go on where I left off yesterday.

I did what I thought I should never do during my long and memorable life: I called on your esteemed ex-acquaintance, Dr. Claude Mullen. I explained how I came to do so, and I desired of him an opinion as to Beverley. He suggested that more evidence would be required before an opinion could be given. What evidence, I suggested, and how to be gotten? He thought the case was one that could best be further studied if the person were put under secret observation—since he revealed himself apparently only when alone. I urged him to take control of the matter, took upon myself, as Beverley's friend, authority to empower him to go on. He ad-

vised that a dictograph be installed in Beverley's room. It would be a good idea to send him a good big bunch of ferns also: the ferns, the dictograph, Beverley alone with them—a clear field.

I explained to Beverley, and we went out and bought a dictograph, and he concealed it where, of course, he could not find it!

In the evening we had a glorious dinner, returned to his rooms, and while I smoked in silence, he, in great peace of mind and profound satisfaction with the world in general, poured into the dictograph his long pent-up opinion of our two dear old friends, Marigold and Mullen. He roared it into the machine, shouted it, raved it, soliloquised it. I had in advance requested him to add my opinion of your former suitor. Each of us had long been waiting for so good a chance and he took full advantage of the opportunity. The next morning I notified Dr. Mullen that Beverley had raved during the night, and that the machine was full of his queer things.

At the appointed hour this morning we assembled in Beverley's rooms. I had cleared away his big centre table, all the rubbish of papers amid which he lives, including some

invaluable manuscripts of his worthless novels. I had taken the cylinders out of the dictograph and had put them in a dictophone, and there on the table lay that Pandora's box of information with a horn attached to it.

Dr. Mullen arrived, bringing with him the truly great New York nerve specialist and scientist whom he relies upon to pilot him in difficult cases. Dr. Marigold had brought the truly great physician and scientist who pilots him. At Beverley's request, I had invited the president of his Club, and he had brought along two Club affinities; three gossips.

I sent Beverley to Brooklyn for the day.

We seated ourselves, and on the still air of the room that unearthly asthmatic horn began to deliver Beverley's opinion. Instantly there was an uproar. There was a scuffle. It was almost a general fight. Drs. Marigold and Mullen had jumped to their feet and shouted their furious protests. One of them started to leave the room. He couldn't, I had locked the door. One slammed at the machine—he was restrained—everybody else wanted to hear Beverley out. And amid the riot Beverley kept on his peaceful way, grinding out his healthy vituperation.

That will do, Polly, my dear. You will never hear anything more of Beverley's being in bad health—not from those two rear-admirals of diagnosis—away in the rear. Another happy result; it saves him at last from Tilly. Her act was one that he will never forgive. His act she will never forgive. The last tie between them is severed now.

But all this is nothing, nothing, nothing! I am lost without you.

BEN.

P. S. Now that I have disposed of two of Beverley's detractors, in a day or two I am going to demolish the third one—an Englishman over on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. I have long waited for the chance to write him just one letter: he's the chief calumniator.

POLLY BOLES TO BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE

Louisville, Kentucky,
June 9, 1912.

DEAR BEN:

I cannot tell you what a relief it brought me to hear that Beverley is well. Of course it was all bound to be a mistake.

At the same time your letters have made me very unhappy. Was it quite fair? Was it open? Was it quite what anyone would have expected of Beverley and you?

Nothing leaves me so undone as what I am not used to in people. I do not like surprises and I do not like changes. I feel helpless unless I can foresee what my friends will do and can know what to expect of them. Frankly, your letters have been a painful shock to me.

I foresee one thing: this will bring Tilly and Dr. Marigold more closely together. She will feel sorry for him, and a woman's sense of fair play will carry her over to his side. You men do not know what fair play is or, if you do, you don't care. Only a woman knows and cares. Please don't keep after Dr. Mullen on my account. Why should you persecute him because he loved me?

Dr. Marigold will want revenge on Beverley, and he will have his revenge—in some way.

Your letters have left me wretched. If you surprise me in this way, how might you not surprise me still further? Oh, if we

could only understand everybody perfectly, and if everything would only settle and stay settled!

My mother is much improved and she has urged me—the doctor says her recovery, though sure, will be gradual—to spend at least a month with her. To-day I have decided to do so. It will be of so much interest to her if I have my wedding clothes made here. You know how few they will be. My dresses last so long, and I dislike changes. I have found my same dear old mantua-maker and she is delighted and proud. But she insists that since I went to New York I have dropped behind and that I will not do even for Louisville.

On my way to her I so enjoy looking at old Louisville houses, left among the new ones. They seem so faithful! My dear old mantua-maker and the dear old houses—they are the real Louisville.

My mother joins me in love to you.

Sincerely yours,

Polly Boles.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO EDWARD BLACKTHORNE

150 Wall Street, New York,
June 10, 1912.

Edward Blackthorne, Esq.,
King Alfred's Wood,
Warwickshire, England.

My dear Sir:

I am a stranger to you. I should have been content to remain a stranger. A grave matter which I have had no hand in shaping causes me to write you this one letter—there being no discoverable likelihood that I shall ever feel painfully obliged to write you a second.

You are a stranger to me. But you are, I have heard, a great man. That, of course, means that you are a famous man, otherwise I should never have heard that you are a great one. You hold a very distinguished place in your country, in the world; people go on pilgrimages to you. The thing that has made you famous and that attracts pilgrims are your novels.

I do not read novels. They contain, I understand, the lives of imaginary people.

I am satisfied to read the lives of actual people and I do read much biography. One of the Lives I like to study is that of Samuel Johnson, and I recall just here some words of his to the effect that he did not feel bound to honour a man who clapped a hump on his shoulder and another hump on his leg and shouted he was Richard the Third. I take the liberty of saying that I share Dr. Johnson's opinion as to puppets, either on the stage or in fiction. The life of the actual Richard interests me, but the life of Shakespeare's Richard doesn't. I should have liked to read the actual life of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

I have never been able to get a clear idea what a novelist is. The novelists that I superficially encounter seem to have no clear idea what they are themselves. No two of them agree. But each of them agrees that *his* duty and business in life is to imagine things and then notify people that those things are true and that they—people—should buy those things and be grateful for them and look up to the superior person who concocted them and wrote them down.

I have observed that there is danger in

many people causing any one person to think himself a superior person unless he *is* a superior person. If he really is what is thought of him, no harm is done him. But if he is widely regarded a superior person and is not a superior person, harm may result to him. For whenever any person is praised beyond his deserts, he is not lifted up by such praise any more than the stature of a man is increased by thickening the heels of his shoes. On the contrary, he is apt to be lowered by over-praise. For, prodded by adulation, he may lay aside his ordinary image and assume, as far as he can, the guise of some inferior creature which more glaringly expresses what he is—as the peacock, the owl, the porcupine, the lamb, the bulldog, the ass. I have seen all these. I have seen the strutting peacock novelist, the solemn, speechless owl novelist, the fretful porcupine novelist, the spring-lamb novelist, the ferocious, jealous bulldog novelist, and the sacred ass novelist. And many others.

You may begin to wonder why I am led into these reflections in this letter. The reason is, I have been wondering into what kind of inferior creature your fame—your

over-praise—has lowered *you*. Frankly, I perfectly know; I will not name the animal. But I feel sure that he is a highly offensive small beast.

If you feel disposed to read further, I shall explain.

I have in my legal possession three letters of yours. They were written to a young gentleman whom I have known now for a good many years, whose character I know about as well as any one man can know another's, and for whom increasing knowledge has always led me to feel increasing respect. The young man is Mr. Beverley Sands. You may now realise what I am coming to.

The first of these letters of yours reveals you as a stranger seeking the acquaintance of Mr. Sands—to a certain limit: you asked of him a courtesy and you offered courtesies in exchange. That is common enough and natural, and fair, and human. But what I have noticed is your doing this with the air of the superior person. Mr. Sands, being a novelist, is of course a superior person. Therefore, you felt called upon to introduce yourself to him as a *more* superior person. That is, you condescended to be gracious.

You made it a virtue in you to ask a favour of him. You expected him to be delighted that you allowed him to serve you.

In the second letter you go further. He wafted some incense toward you and you got on your knees to this incense. You get up and offer him more courtesies—all courtesies. Because he praised you, you even wish him to visit you.

Now the third letter. The favour you asked of Mr. Sands was that he send you some ferns. By no fault of his except too much confidence in the agents he employed (he over-trusts everyone and over-trusted you), by no other fault of his the ferns were not sent. You waited, time passed, you grew impatient, you grew suspicious of Mr. Sands, you felt slighted, you became piqued in your vanity, wounded in your self-love, you became resentful, you became furious, you became revengeful, you became abusive. You told him that he had never meant to keep his word, that you had kicked his books out of your library, that he might profitably study the moral sensitiveness of a head of cabbage.

During the summer American tourists vis-

ited you—pilgrims of your fame. You took advantage of their visit to promulgate mysteriously your hostility to Mr. Sands. Not by one explicit word, you understand. Your exalted imagination merely lied on him, and you entrusted to other imaginations the duty of scattering broadcast your noble lie. They did this—some of them happening not to be friends of Mr. Sands—and as a result of the false light you threw upon his character, he now in the minds of many persons rests under a cloud. And that cloud is never going to be dispelled.

Enclosed you will please find copies of these three letters of yours; would you mind reading them over? And you will find also a packet of letters which will enable you to understand why the ferns never reached you and the whole entanglement of the case. And finally, you will find enclosed a brief with which, were I to appear in Court against you, as Mr. Sands's lawyer, I should hold you up to public view as what you are.

I shall merely add that I have often met you in the courtroom as the kind of criminal who believes without evidence and who distrusts without reason; who is, therefore, ready

to blast a character upon suspicion. If he dislikes the person, in the absence of evidence against him, he draws upon the dark traits of his own nature to furnish the evidence.

I have written because I am a friend of Mr. Sands.

I am, as to you,

Merely,

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE.

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE TO BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE

King Alfred's Wood,
Warwickshire, England,
June 21, 1912.

Benjamin Doolittle,
150 Wall Street,
New York City.

MY DEAR SIR:

You state in your letter, which I have just laid down, that you are a stranger to me. There is no conceivable reason why I should wish to offer you the slightest rudeness—even that of crossing your word—yet may I say, that I know you perfectly? If you had unfortu-

nately read some of my very despicable novels, you might have found, scattered here and there, everything that you have said in your letter, and almost in your very words. That is, I have two or three times drawn your portrait, or at least drawn at it; and thus while you are indeed a stranger to me in name, I feel bound to say that you are an old acquaintance in nature.

You cannot for a moment imagine—however, you despise imagination and I withdraw the offensive word—you cannot for a moment suppose that I can have any motive in being discourteous, and I shall, therefore, go on to say, but only with your permission, that the first time I attempted to sketch you, was in a very early piece of work; I was a youthful novelist, at the outset of my career. I projected a story entitled: "*The Married Cross-Purposes of Ned and Sal Blivvens.*" I feel bound to say that you in your letter pleasantly remind me of the *Sal Blivvens* of my story. In Sal's eyes poor Ned's failing was this: as twenty-one human shillings he never made an exact human guinea—his shillings ran a few pence over, or they fell a few pence short. That is, Ned never did just enough of any-

thing, or said just enough, but either too much or too little to suit *Sal*. He never had just one idea about any one thing, but two or three ideas; he never felt in just one way about any one thing, but had mixed feelings, a variety of feelings. He was not a yard measure or a pint measure or a pound measure; he overflowed or he didn't fill, and any one thing in him always ran into other things in him.

Being a young novelist I was not satisfied to offer *Sal* to the world on her own account, but I must try to make her more credible and formidable by following her into the next generation, and giving her a son who inherited her traits. Thus I had *Tommy Blivvens*. When Tommy was old enough to receive his first allowance of Christmas pudding, he proceeded to take the pudding to pieces. He picked out all the raisins and made a little pile of them. And made a little separate pile of the currants, and another pile of the almonds, and another of the citron, or of whatever else there was to separate. Then in profound satisfaction he ate them, pile by pile, as a philosopher of the sure.

Thus—and I insist I mean no disrespect—your letter does revive for me a little innocent

laughter at my early literary vision of a human baggage—friend of my youthful days and artistic enthusiasm—*Sal Blivvens*. I arranged that when *Ned* died, his neighbours all felt sorry and wished him a green turf for his grave. *Sal*, I felt sure, survived him as one who all her life walks past every human heart and enters none—being always dead-sure, always dead-right; for the human heart rejects perfection in any human being.

I recognise you as belonging to the large tough family of the human cocksures. *Sal Blivvens* belonged to it—dead-sure, dead-right, every time. We have many of the cocksures in England, you must have many of them in the United States. The cocksures are people who have no dim borderland around their minds, no twilight between day and darkness. They see everything as they see a highly coloured rug on a well-lighted floor. There is either rug or no rug, either floor or no floor. No part of the floor could possibly be rug and no part of the rug could possibly be floor. A cocksure, as a lawyer, is the natural prosecuting attorney of human nature's natural misgivings and wiser doubts and nobler errors. How the American cocksures of their

day despised the man Washington, who often prayed for guidance; with what contempt they blasted the character of your Abraham Lincoln, whose patient soul inhabited the border of a divine disquietude and whose public life was the patient study of hesitation.

I have taken notice of the peculiarly American character of your cocksureness: it magnifies and qualifies a man to step by the mile, to sit down by the acre, to utter things by the ton. Do you happen to know Michael Angelo's *Moses?* I always think of an American cocksure as looking like Michael Angelo's *Moses*—colossal law-giver, a hyper-stupendous fellow. And I have often thought that a regiment of American cocksures would be the most terrific spectacle on a battlefield that the rest of the human race could ever face. Just now it has occurred to me that it was your great Emerson who spoke best on the weakness of the superlative—the cocksure is the human superlative.

As to your letter: You declare you know nothing about novels, but your arraignment of the novelist is exact. You are dead-sure that you are perfectly right about me. Your arraignment of me is exact. You are con-

scious of no more moral perturbation as to justice than exists in a monkey wrench. But that is the nature of the cocksure—his conclusions have to him the validity of a hardware store.

This, however, is nothing. I clear it away in order to tell you that I am filled with admiration of your loyalty to your friend, and of the savage ferocity with which you attack me as his enemy. That makes you a friend worth having, and I wish you were to be numbered among mine; there are none too many such in this world. Next, I wish to assure you that I have studied your brief against me and confess that you have made out the case. I fell into a grave mistake, I wronged your friend deeply, I hope not irreparably, and it was a poor, sorry, shabby business. I am about to write to Mr. Sands. If he is what you say he is, then in an instant he will forgive me—though you never may. I shall ask him, as I could not have asked him before, whether he will not come to visit me. My house, my hospitality, all that I have and all that I am, shall be his. I shall take every step possible to undo what I thoughtlessly, impulsively did. I shall write to the President of his Club.

One exception is filed to a specification in your brief: no such things took place in my garden upon the visit of the American tourists, as you declare. I did not promulgate any mysterious hostility to Mr. Sands. You tell me that among those tourists were persons hostile to Mr. Sands. It was these hostile persons who misinterpreted and exaggerated whatever took place. You knew these persons to be enemies of Mr. Sands's and then you accepted their testimony as true—being a cocksure.

A final word to you. Your whole character and happiness rests upon the belief that you see life clearly and judge rightly the fellow-beings whom you know. Those *you* doubt ought to be doubted and those *you* trust ought to be trusted! Now I have travelled far enough on life's road to have passed its many human figures—perhaps all the human types that straggle along it in their many ways. No figures on that road have been more noticeable to me than here and there a man in whom I have discerned a broken cocksure.

You say you like biography: do you like to read the Life of Robert Burns? And I

wonder whether these words of his have ever guided you in your outlook upon life:

"*Then gently scan your brother man*

. . . . .

To step aside is human."

I thank you again. I wish you well. And I hope that no experience, striking at you out of life's uncertainties, may ever leave you one of those noticeable men—a broken cocksure.

Your deeply obliged and very grateful,

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

June 30, 1912.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

About a month ago I took it upon myself to write the one letter that had long been raging in my mind to Edward Blackthorne. And I sent him all the fern letters. And then I drew up the whole case and prosecuted him as your lawyer.

Of course I meant my letter to be an infernal machine that would blow him to pieces. He merely inspected it, removed the fuse and

inserted a crank, and turned it into a music-box to grind out his praises.

And then the kind of music he ground out for me.

All day I have been ashamed to stand up and I've been ashamed to sit down. He told me that my letter reminded him of a character in his first novel—a woman called *Sal Blivvens*. ME—*Sal Blivvens!*

But of what use is it for us poor, common-clay, rough, ordinary men who have no imagination—of what use is it for us to attack you superior fellows who have it, have imagination? You are the Russians of the human mind, and when attacked on your frontiers, you merely retreat into a vast, unknown, uninvadable country. The further you retire toward the interior of your mysterious kingdom, the nearer you seem to approach the fortresses of your strength.

I am wiser—if no better. If ever again I feel like attacking any stranger with a letter, I shall try to ascertain beforehand whether he is an ordinary man like me or a genius. If he is a genius, I am going to let him alone.

Yet, damn me if I, too, wouldn't like to see your man Blackthorne now. Ask him

some time whether a short visit from Benjamin Doolittle could be arranged on any terms of international agreement.

Now for something on my level of ordinary life! A day or two ago I was waiting in front of the residence of one of my uptown clients, a few doors from the residence of your friend Dr. Marigold. While I waited, he came out on the front steps with Dr. Mullen. As I drove past, I leaned far out and made them a magnificent sweeping bow: one can afford to be forgiving and magnanimous after he settled things to his satisfaction. They did not return the bow but exchanged quiet smiles. I confess the smiles have rankled. They seemed like saying: he bows best who bows last.

You are the best thing in New York to me since Polly went away. Without you both it would come near to being one vast solitude.

BEN (alias *Sal Blivvens*).

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE

July 1, 1912.

DEAR BEN:

I wrote you this morning upon receipt of your letter telling me of your own terrific

letter to Mr. Blackthorne and of your merciless arraignment of him. Let me say again that I wish to pour out my gratitude to you for your motives and also, well, also my regret at your action. Somehow I have been reminded of Voltaire's saying: he had a brother who was such a fool that he started out to be perfect; as a consequence the world knows nothing of Voltaire's brother: it knows very well Voltaire with his faults.

The mail of yesterday which brought you Mr. Blackthorne's reply to your arraignment brought me also a letter: he must have written to us both instantly. His letter is the only one that I cannot send you; you would not desire to read it. You are too big and generous, too warmly human, too exuberantly vital, to care to lend ear to a great man's chagrin and regret for an impulsive mistake. You are not Cassius to carp at Cæsar.

Now this afternoon a second letter comes from Mr. Blackthorne and that I enclose: it will do you good to read it—it is not a black passing cloud, it is steady human sunlight.

BEVERLEY.

[Enclosed letter from Edward Blackthorne]

My dear Mr. Sands:

I follow up my letter of yesterday with the unexpected tidings of to-day. I am willing to believe that these will interest you as associated with your coming visit.

Hodge is dead. His last birthday, his final natal eclipse, has bowled him over and left him darkened for good. He can trouble us no more, but will now do his part as mould for the rose of York and the rose of Lancaster. He will help to make a mound for some other Englishman's ferns. When you come—and I know you will come—we shall drink a cup of tea in the garden to his peaceful memory—and to his troubled memory for Latin.

I am now waiting for you. Come, out of your younger world and with your youth to an older world and to an older man. And let each of us find in our meeting some presage of an alliance which ought to grow always closer in the literatures of the two nations. Their literatures hold their ideals; and if their ideals touch and mingle, then nothing practical can long keep them far apart. If two oak trees reach one another with their branches,

they must meet in their roots; for the branches are aerial roots and the roots are underground branches.

Come. In the eagerness of my letter of yesterday to put myself not in the right but less, if possible, in the wrong, I forgot the very matter with which the right and the wrong originated.

Will you, after all, send the ferns?

The whole garden waits for them; a white light falls on the vacant spot; a white light falls on your books in my library; a white light falls on you.

I wait for you, both hands outstretched.

EDWARD BLACKTHORNE.

(Note penciled on the margin of the letter by Beverley Sands to Ben Doolittle: "You will see that I am back where the whole thing started; I have to begin all over again with the ferns. And now the florists will be after me again. I feel this in the trembling marrow of my bones, and my bones by this time are a wireless station on this subject.")

BEVERLEY.

JUDD & JUDD TO BEVERLEY SANDS

July 3, 1912.

DEAR SIR:

We take pleasure in enclosing our new catalogue for the coming autumn, and should be pleased to receive any further commissions for the European trade.

We repeat that we have no connection whatever with any house doing business in the city under the name of Botany.

Respectfully yours,

JUDD & JUDD,

Per Q.

PHILLIPS & FAULDS TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Louisville, Kentucky,
July 4th, 1912.

DEAR SIR:

Venturing to recall ourselves to your memory for the approaching autumn season, in view of having been honoured upon a previous occasion with your flattering patronage, and reasoning that our past transactions have been mutually satisfactory, we avail ourselves of this opportunity of reviving the conjunction heretofore existing between us as most gratifying and thank you sincerely for past

favours. We hope to continue our pleasant relations and desire to say that if you should contemplate arranging for the shipments of plants of any description, we could afford you surprised satisfaction.

Respectfully yours,
PHILLIPS & FAULDS.

BURNS & BRUCE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Dunkirk, Tennessee,
July 6, 1912.

DEAR SIR:

We are prepared to supply you with anything you need. Could ship ferns to any country in Europe, having done so for the late Noah Chamberlin, the well-known florist just across the State line, who was a customer of ours.

old debts of Phillips and Faulds not yet paid. had to drop them entirely.

Very truly yours,
BURNS & BRUCE.

If you need any forest trees, we could supply you with all the forest trees you want. plenty of oaks, etc. plenty of elms, plenty of walnuts, etc.

ANDY PETERS TO BEVERLEY SANDS

Seminole, North Carolina,
July 7th, 1912.

DEAR SIR:

I have lately enlarged my business and will be able to handle any orders you may give me. The orders which Miss Clara Louise Chamberlain said you were to send have not yet turned up. I write to you, because I have heard about you a great deal through Miss Clara Louise, since her return from her visit to New York. She succeeded in getting two or three donations of books for our library, and they have now given her a place there. I was sorry to part with Miss Clara Louise, but I had just married, and after the first few weeks I expected my wife to become my assistant. I am not saying anything against Miss Clara Louise, but she *was* expensive on my sweet violets, especially on a Sunday, having the run of the flowers. She and Alice didn't get along very well together, and I did have a bad set-back with my violets while she was here.

Seedlins is one of my specialities. I make

a speciality of seedlins. If you want any seedlins, will you call on me? I am young and just married and anxious to please, and I wish you would call on me when you want anything green. Nothing dried.

Yours respectfully,

ANDY PETERS.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

July 7th, 1912.

DEAR BEVERLEY:

It makes me a little sad to write. I suppose you saw in this morning's paper the announcement of Tilly's marriage next week to Dr. Marigold. Nevertheless—congratulations! You have lost years of youth and happiness with some lovely woman on account of your dalliance with her.

Now at last, you will let her alone, and you will soon find—Nature will quickly drive you to find—the one you deserve to marry.

It looks selfish at such a moment to set my happiness over against your unhappiness,

but I've just had news, that at last, after lingering so long and a little mysteriously in Louisville, Polly is coming. Polly is coming with her wedding clothes. We long ago decided to have no wedding. All that we have long wished is to marry one another. Mr. Blackthorne called me a cocksure. Well, Polly is another cocksure. We shall jog along as a perfectly satisfied couple of cocksures on the cocksure road. (I hope to God Polly will never find out that she married *Sal Blivvens*.)

Dear fellow, truest of comrades among men, it is inevitable that I reluctantly leave you somewhat behind, desert you a little, as the friend who marries.

One awful thought freezes me to my chair this hot July day. You have never said a word about Miss Clara Louise Chamberlain, since the day of my hypothetical charge to the jury. Can it be possible that you followed her up? Did you feed her any more cheques? I have often warned you against Tilly, as inconstant. But, my dear fellow, remember there is a worse extreme than in inconstancy—Clara Louise would be sealing wax. You would merely be marrying 115 pounds of

sealing wax. Every time she sputtered in conversation, she'd seal you the tighter.

Polly is coming with her wedding clothes.

BEN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

July 8.

DEAR BEN:

I saw the announcement in the morning paper about Tilly.

It wouldn't be worth while to write how I feel.

It is true that I traced Miss Chamberlain, homeless in New York. And I saw her. As to whether I have been feeding cheques to her, that is solely a question of my royalties. Royalties are human gratitude; why should not the dews of gratitude fall on one so parched? Besides, I don't owe you anything, gentleman.

Yes, I feel you're going—you're passing on to Polly. I append a trifle which explains itself, and am, making the best of everything, the same

BEVERLEY SANDS.

A Meditation in Verse
(*Dedicated to Benjamin Doolittle as showing his favourite weakness*)

How can I mind the law's delay,
Or what a jury thinks it knows,
Or what some fool of a judge may say?
Polly comes with the wedding clothes.

Time, who cheated me so long,
Kept me waiting mid life's snows,
I forgive and forget your wrong:
Polly comes with the wedding clothes.

Winter's lonely sky is gone,
July blazes with the rose,
All the world looks smiling on
At Polly in her wedding clothes.

BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE TO BEVERLEY SANDS

[A hurried letter by messenger]

July 10, 1912.

Polly reached New York two days ago. I went up that night. She had gone out—alone. She did not return that night. I found this out when I went up yesterday morning and asked for her. She has not

been there since she left. They know nothing about her. I have telegraphed Louisville. They have sent me no word. Come down at once.

BEN.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BEN DOOLITTLE

[Hurried letter by messenger]

July 10, 1912.

DEAR BEN:

Is anything wrong about Polly?

I met her on the street yesterday. She tried to pass without speaking. I called to her but she walked on. I called again and she turned, hesitatingly, then came back very slowly to meet me half-way. You know how composed her manner always is. But she could not control her emotion: she was deeply, visibly troubled. Strange as it may seem, while I thought of the mystery of her trouble, I could but notice a trifle, as at such moments one often does: she was beautifully dressed: a new charm, a youthful freshness, was all over her as for some impending ceremony. We have always thought of Polly as one of the women who are above dress. Such disregard

was in a way a verification of her character, the adornment of her sincerity. Now she was beautifully dressed.

"But what is the meaning of all this?" I asked, frankly mystified.

Something in her manner checked the question, forced back my words.

"You will hear," she said, with quivering lips. She looked me searchingly all over the face as for the sake of dear old times now ended. Then she turned off abruptly. I watched her in sheer amazement till she disappeared.

I have been waiting to hear from you, but cannot wait any longer. What does it mean? Why don't you tell me?

BEVERLEY.

BEVERLEY SANDS TO BENJAMIN DOOLITTLE

July 11.

I have with incredible eyes this instant read this cutting from the morning paper:

> Miss Polly Boles married yesterday at the City Hall in Jersey City to Dr. Claude Mullen.

She must have been on her way when I saw her.

I have read the announcement without being able to believe it—with some kind of death in life at my heart.

Oh, Ben, Ben, Ben! So betrayed! I am coming at once.

BEVERLEY.

DIARY OF BEVERLEY SANDS

July 18.

The ferns have had their ironic way with us and have wrought out their bitter comedy to its end. The little group of us who were the unsuspecting players are henceforth scattered, to come together in the human playhouse not again. The stage is empty, the curtain waits to descend, and I, who innocently brought the drama on, am left the solitary figure to speak the epilogue ere I, too, depart to go my separate road.

This is Tilly's wedding day. How beautiful the morning is for her! The whole sky is one exquisite blue—no sign of any storm-plan far or near. The July air blows as cool as early May. I sit at my window writing and it flows over me in soft waves, the fragrances of the green park below my window enter

my room and encircle me like living human tendernesses. At this moment, I suppose, Tilly is dressing for her wedding, and I—God knows why—am thinking of old-time Kentucky gardens in one of which she played as a child. Tilly, a little girl romping in her mother's garden—Tilly before she was old enough to know anything of the world—anything of love—now, as she dresses for her wedding—I cannot shut out that vision of early purity.

Yesterday a note came from her. I had had no word since the day I openly ridiculed the man she is to marry. But yesterday she sent me this message:

"Come to-night and say good-bye."

She was not in her rooms to greet me. I waited. Moments passed, long moments of intense expectancy. She did not enter. I fixed my eyes on her door. Once I saw it pushed open a little way, then closed. Again it was opened and again it was held as though for lack of will or through quickly changing impulses. Then it was opened and she entered and came toward me, not looking at me, but with her face turned aside. She advanced a few paces and with some

swift, imperious rebellion, she turned and passed out of the room and then came quickly back. She had caught up her bridal veil. She held the wreath in her hand and as she approached me, I know not with what sudden emotion she threw a corner of the veil over her head and face and shoulders. And she stood before me with I know not what struggle tearing her heart. Almost in a whisper she said:

"Lift my veil."

I lifted her veil and laid it back over her forehead. She closed her eyes as tears welled out of them.

"Kiss me," she said.

I would have taken her in my arms as mine at that moment for all time, but she stepped back and turned away, fading from me rather than walking, with her veil pressed like a handkerchief to her eyes. The door closed on her.

I waited. She did not come again.

Now she is dressing for the marriage ceremony. A friend gives her a house wedding. The company of guests will be restricted, everything will be exquisite, there will be youth and beauty and distinction. There

will be no love. She marries as one who steps through a beautiful arch further along one's path.

Whither that path leads, I do not know; from what may lie at the end of it I turn away and shudder.

My thought of Tilly on her wedding morning is of one exiled from happiness because nature withheld from her the one thing needed to make her all but perfect: that needful thing was just a little more constancy. It is her doom, forever to stretch out her hand toward a brimming goblet, but ere she can bring it to her lips it drops from her hand. Forever her hand stretched out toward joy and forever joy shattered at her feet.

American scientists have lately discovered or seem about to discover, some new fact in Nature—the butterfly migrates. What we have thought to be the bright-winged inhabitant of a single summer in a single zone follows summer's retreating wave and so dwells in a summer that is perpetual. If Tilly is the psyche of life's fields, then she seeks perpetual summer as the law of her own being. All our lives move along old, old paths. There is no new path for any of us. If Tilly's fate is the

butterfly path, who can judge her harshly? Not I.

They sail away at once on their wedding journey. He has wealth and social influence of the fashionable sort which overflows into the social mirrors of metropolitan journalism: the papers found space for their plans of travel: England and Scotland, France and Switzerland, Austria and Germany, Bohemia and Poland, Russia, Italy and Sicily—home. The great world-path of the human butterfly, seeking summer with insatiate quest.

Home to his practice with that still fluttering psyche! And then the path—the domestic path—stretching straight onward across the fields of life—what of his psyche then? Will she fold her wings on a bed-post—year after year slowly opening and unfolding those brilliant wings amid the cob-webs of the same bed-post? . . .

I cannot write of human life unless I can forgive life. How forgive unless I can understand? I have wrought with all that is within me to understand Polly—her treachery up to the last moment, her betrayal of Ben's devotion. What I have made out dimly, darkly, doubtfully, is this: Her whole character seems

built upon one trait, one virtue—loyalty. She was disloyal to Ben because she had come to believe that he was disloyal to her sovereign excellence. There were things in his life which he persistently refused to tell; perhaps every day there were mere trifles which he did not share with her—why should he? On a certain memorable morning she discovered that for years he had been keeping from her some affairs of mine: that was his loyalty to me; she thought it was his disloyalty to her.

I cannot well picture Polly as a lute, but I think that was the rift in the lute. Still a man must not surrender himself wholly into the keeping of the woman he loves; let him, and he becomes anything in her life but a man.

Meantime Polly found near by another suitor who offered her all he was—what little there was of him—one of those man-climbers who must run over the sheltering wall of some woman. Thus there was gratified in Polly her one passion for marrying—that she should possess a pet. Now she possesses one, owns him, can turn him round and round, can turn him inside out, can see all there is of him as she sees her pocket-handker-

chief, her breast-pin, her coffee cup, or any little familiar piece of property which she can become more and more attached to as the years go by for the reason that it will never surprise her, never puzzle her, never change except by wearing out.

This will be the end of the friendship between Drs. Marigold and Mullen: their wives will see to that. So much the better: scattered impostors do least harm.

I have struggled to understand the mystery of her choice as to how she should be married. Surely marriage, in the existence of any one, is the hour when romance buds on the most prosaic stalk. It budded for Polly and she eloped! It was a short troubled flight of her heavy mind without the wings of imagination. She got as far as the nearest City Hall. Instead of a minister she chose to be married by a Justice of the Peace: Ben had been unjust, she would be married by the figure of Justice as a penal ceremony executed over Ben: she mailed him a paper and left him to understand that she had fled from him to Justice and Peace! Polly's poetry!

A line in an evening paper lets me know that she and the Doctor have gone for their

honeymoon to Ocean Grove. When Polly first came North to live and the first summer came round she decided to spend it at Ocean Grove, with the idea, I think, that she would get a grove and an ocean with one railway ticket, without having to change; she could settle in a grove with an ocean and in an ocean with a grove. What her disappointment was I do not know, but every summer she has gone back to Ocean Grove—the Franklin Flats by the sea. . . .

Yesterday I said good-bye to Ben. I had spent part of every evening with him since Polly's marriage—silent, empty evenings—a quiet, stunned man. Confidence in himself blasted out of him, confidence in human nature, in the world. With no imagination in him to deal with the reasons of Polly's desertion—just a passive acceptance of it as a wall accepts a hole in it made by a cannon ball.

Her name was never called. A stunned, silent man. Clear, joyous steady light in his eyes gone—an uncertain look in them. Strangest of all, a reserve in his voice, hesitation. And courtesy for bluff warm confidence—courtesy as of one who stumblingly reflects that he must begin to be careful with everybody.

His active nature meantime kept on. Life swept him forward—nature did—whether he would or not. I went down late one evening. Evidently he had been working in his room all day; the things Polly must have sent him during all those years were gone. He had on new slippers, a fresh robe, taking the place of the slippers and the robe she had made for him. Often I have seen him tuck the robe in about his neck as a man might reach for the arms of a woman to draw them about his throat as she leans over him from behind.

During our talk that evening he began strangely to speak of things that had taken place years before in Kentucky, in his youth, on the farm; did I remember this in Kentucky, could I recall that? His mind had gone back to old certainties. It was like his walking away from present ruins toward things still unharmed—never to be harmed.

Early next morning he surprised me by coming up, dressed for travel, holding a grip.

"I am going to Kentucky," he said.

I went to the train with him. His reserve deepened on the way; if he had plans, he did not share them with me.

What I make out of it is that he will come back married. No engagement this time, no waiting. Swift marriage for what marriage will sadly bring him. I think she will be young —this time. But she will be, as nearly as possible, like Polly. Any other kind of woman now would leave him a desolate, empty-hearted man for life. He thinks he will be getting some one to take Polly's place. In reality it will be his second attempt to marry Polly.

I am bidding farewell the little group of us. Some one else will have to write of me. How can I write of myself? This I will say: that I think that I am a sheep whose fate it is to leave a little of his wool on every bramble.

I sail next week for England to make my visit to Mr. Blackthorne—at last. Another letter has come from him. He has thrown himself into the generous work of seeing that my visit to him shall make me known. He tells me there will be a house party, a week-end; some of the great critics will be there, some writers. "You must be found out in England widely and at once," he writes.

My heart swells as one who feels himself climbing toward a height. There is kindled in me that strangest of all the flames that burn

in the human heart, the shining thought that my life is destined to be more than mine, that my work will make its way into other minds and mingle with the better, happier impulses of other lives.

The ironic ferns have had their way with us. But after all has it not been for the best? Have they not even in their irony been the emblems of fidelity?

They have found us out, they have played upon our weaknesses, they have exaggerated our virtues until these became vices, they have separated us and set us going our diverging ways.

But while we human beings are moving in every direction over the earth, the earth without our being conscious of it is carrying us in one same direction. So as we follow the different pathways of our lives which appear to lead toward unfaithfulness to one another, may it not be true that to the Power which sets us all in motion and drives us whither it will all our lives are the Emblems of Fidelity?

THE END

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.